



PRESS UNION OF LIBERIA (PUL)

Clay Street P.O.Box 20-4209-Tel : (231)886-514-308; Email: pressunionofliberia@yahoo.com

Report On The Press Union of Liberia (PUL) Investigation Into Complaint Filed By The President Pro-tempore of the Liberian Senate, Prof. Albert T Chie, Against Journalists Obed S Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee, Lead Commentators Of Joy FM Radio, May 20, 20 21

INTRODUCTION

This report covered inquiries and findings into complaint filed by the President Pro-tempore of the Liberian Senate Prof. Albert T. Chie against Joy FM Radio lead commentators Obed S Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee and the investigation was held on May 17, 2021

ABOUT THE PRESS UNION OF LIBERIA:

The Press Union of Liberia was founded on September 30, 1964 by a group of independent journalists. It serves as an umbrella organization for media professionals and institutions to advocate for press freedom and the legal protection of journalists.

The PUL collaborates with local, national and international organizations including the Liberian Ministry of Information, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Federation of African Journalists (FAJ), West African Journalists Association (WAJA) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE:

The Code of Ethics of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) was the instrument used in the investigation to determine findings. The PUL code of ethics was adopted by Liberian journalists for the purpose of self-regulating media accountability and professional conduct in Liberia, pursuant to internationally accepted media ethical standards. The code of ethics and conduct for Liberian Journalists has been drawn up as a ready reference guide and its application is binding on all members of the Press Union of Liberia, all journalists and media institutions in Liberia.

The importance of the PUL code of ethics is to ensure that members of the press union of Liberia adhere to the highest ethical standards, professional competence and good behavior in performing their duties and punishment for violators shall range from warning, fine, suspension and expulsion. This is necessary considering the demand for quality and professional journalism that best serves the interest of the Liberian public, thus maintaining the independence of the Liberian media. According to Article six of the PUL code of ethics, malicious information liable to discredit a person or expose him/her to scorn or hate should not be published /broadcast.

Purpose of the Investigation

The public expect the media to perform with a high sense of responsibility without infringing on the rights of individuals and society. Therefore, the investigation was aimed at authenticating whether or not the two journalists reported without distortions, because article three of the code of ethics, creates a compelling need for journalists to refrain from plagiarism, defamation, obscenity, slander and formless accusations.

Where there is need to use others' material, it is proper to credit the source. Journalists are required to report the facts. In all instances, the accuracy of the facts reported or commented on, shall not be misrepresented through the journalists personal opinions.

The purpose of the investigation is to also ensure compliance to the PUL code of ethics and hold media practitioners accountable when they violate societal norms and the PUL code of ethics. The process was also intended to give a fair hearing, authenticate the facts, mediate and peacefully settle the matter.

INVESTIGATIVE PANEL/PARTICIPANTS

Participants at the investigation included a representative of the national media council of the PUL and the leadership of the PUL headed by Charles B Coffey Jr as president. The two Joy FM journalists Obed S Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee who were the defendants participated in the exercise. The President Pro-tempore of the Liberian Senate who complained, was represented by Mr. Jarlawa Tonpo, Director of Press and Public Affairs at the Liberian Senate.

The investigation was free, fair, transparent and impartial. The President of the Press Union of Liberia, (PUL) Charles B Coffey, Jr presided over the hearing as required by the Press Union of Liberia constitution. Every participant was allowed to speak out freely, without fear, or favor. Parliamentary procedure was upheld during the entire process. There was no moment of argument or disagreement during the entire exercise.

ABOUT THE COMPLAINT:

On May 12, 2021, the President Protempore of the Liberian Senate, Prof. Albert T Chie, communicated with the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) complaining two Liberian Journalists, Obed Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee, lead commentators of Joy FM Radio.

In his formal communication , Pro-tempore Chie accused Obed Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee of malicious, callous, unethical, mendacious, fallacious and scandalous commentary which according to the pro-tempore they were running on Joy FM and few other stations against him purposefully to injure he Senator Chie's reputation.

In the Complaint, Senator Chie also said the Joy FM lead commentators Obed Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee were audaciously playing a recording in which he protempore Chie was



inquiring information on the status of a legitimate budgetary allocation appropriated to the Liberian Senate and the office of the president pro-tempore as operational funds.

Pro-tempore Chie also accused Obed Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee of rolling distorted version of the recording on their station and using same to ridiculously incriminate his discussion wrongly, purposefully suggesting that he Chie was making a deal and/or inducing an assistant Minister of the Finance Ministry to make some illegitimate or shady payment to his office-in effect, broadly accusing he Senator Chie of corruption, even though the recording in their possession doesn't back such outlandish and erroneous claim.

PUL INTERVENTION IN THE MATTER

Upon receipt and perusal of the complaint, the PUL leadership communicated with journalists Obed S Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee of Joy FM, with a copy of Senator Chie's complaint attached. The PUL communication to the two journalists served as official invitation for the investigation.

The office of the Pro-tempore was also invited. After informing both parties about the investigation, the Union's leadership constituted an investigative panel comprising a representative of the National Media Council of the Press Union of Liberia and the leadership of the Press Union Liberia. Prior to the investigation, Obed S. Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee officially communicated with the PUL responding to Senator Chie's complaint. They also honored the invitation.

GIBAH AND DARZEE RESPONSE

In their letter dated May 17, 2021, Mr. Gibah and Darzee confirmed playing a recording containing the voice of Senator Albert T Chie, President Pro-tempore of the Liberian Senate, but denied accusing the senator of soliciting money for the passage of a budget.

They also confirmed discussing the printing of the new bank notes but denied accusing Senator Chie directly or indirectly of seeking money from an assistant minister of finance for the purpose of authorizing the printing of the new Liberian bank notes.

However, Gibah and Darzee alleged that the Executive Branch of the Liberian government was lobbying with the legislature to place the picture of President George M Weah on the 1000 LD new family bank notes.

They also confirmed that the audio or recording in question was obtained last year and not a new recording as being reported by some media institutions. The further indicated that during their radio show, reference was made to the recording in which they blamed the pro-tempore of only advocating for the senate, instead of the public.

Notwithstanding, Mr. Gibah and Darzee in the concluding paragraph of their letter took cognizant of Senator Chie's complaint and vowed to endeavor in different capacities to drive

national growth. The two journalists re-iterated that the recording in question did not reference such thing regarding a shady deal as mentioned.

However, to authenticate the fact, the president of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) Charles B Coffey, Jr requested Gibah and Darzee to provide the entire audio of their radio discussion during the period under review. In compliance with the PUL president's mandated, Mr. Gibah and Mr. Darzee produced the audio which was live on their face-book page.

The audio was carefully, professionally and technically auditioned in line with best journalistic principles. The audio confirmed that the Joy FM radio show discussion was about the payment of funds from the senate's budget, requested by the president pro-tempore of the Liberian senate.

After carefully listening and analyzing the radio discussion and the voice of Senator Chie, it was realized that the audio or voice of the president pro-tempore was not about criminal deal, rather it was about legitimate budget discussion of the Liberian Senate and the office of the president protempore as such nothing was sinister.

However, the way it was being discussed by the two journalists or the style of their presentation appears that the pro-tempore was doing something wrong.

Gibah and Darzee further told the PUL that their decision, raising issues about the protempore being more concerned about the senate budget and his office budget than the public was no way intended to execute embedded motives crudely aimed at tarnishing the good earned reputation of the pro-tempore, as the president pro-tempore indicated in his complaint to the PUL.

According to them, the discussion on Joy FM radio was intended for them to enlighten the public about critical national issues thereby putting pressure on public officials to fully prioritize the public's interest.

Findings

1. The investigation discovered that per the recording auditioned by the PUL, the two Joy FM journalists, Obed S. Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee brought senator Chie's audio to the public's sphere.
2. In the audio, senator Chie was heard, discussing the budget of the Liberian Senate, simply inquiring information, demanding the payment of lawful budgetary allocation to the Liberian Senate and his office. His discussion clearly provided an indication of his responsibility to ensure the smooth running of the senate.
3. Notwithstanding, Gibah and Darzee Joy FM radio discussion did not link the protempore to corruption. They however, felt short of only playing last year (2020) recording without outstanding issues relating to the 2020 budget.
4. The two journalists also failed to make follow-ups on new issues they were raising in their discussion, such as the alleged lobbying of the Executive Branch of the Liberian Government with the Liberian senate to place President George M Weah picture on the 1000 dollar of the new Liberian bank notes.
5. During the investigation, it was learnt that Senator Chie request for the payment of funds from the senate's budget and the budget of the pro-tempore office was lawful, because it is by law that there should be budgetary allocation for the legislature to be more effective and efficient.

6. There was nothing wrong with the Pro-tempore reminding state financial institution responsible to conform to the constitutional provision and provide payment of funds from the senate's budget. It was further revealed that few of the radio stations that have played the voice or audio of the pro-tempore did not fairly obtain the recording. From what the panel listened to, from the Joy FM Radio recording, it was cleared that the audio other stations were playing was said to have been distorted.

7. Such action is a complete violation of article 4 of the PUL code of ethics relating to intellectual property. Section 4.1 provides that journalist shall refrain from any form of plagiarism or unfair use of others' work and materials (for example: photo, excerpts, etc) sources should be credited at all times.

8. They have misinformed the public that the President Pro-tempore of the Senate, Albert T Chie was inducing an assistant minister for the senate to authorize the printing of the new Liberian dollar bank notes, whereby the audio in question was about 2020 budget in which payment of funds from the senate's budget and the budget of the president pro-tempore office ~~the~~ were being requested. Every discussion heard in senator Chie's audio was about last year (2020) budget which has since been passed. In the audio, senator Chie was also heard, urging those concerned to release the appropriate funds from the senate's budget and his office budget.

Conclusion

Following the auditioning of the audio presented by Obed S Gibah and Emmanuel Darzee lead commentators of Joy FM radio, coupled with an exhaustive questioning on issues raised by the president pro-tempore of the Liberian Senate and responses from Gibah and Darzee, it was realized that the intent of the Joy FM commentators for playing the 2020 recording of Senator Chie was done void of prejudice. The investigation also discovered that the recording in question was not new and it has nothing relating to the printing of new Liberian dollar bank notes as being perceived in some quarters of the Liberian society.

That Obed and Darzee did not do adequate follow ups to authenticate the facts on the alleged lobbying of the Executive Branch of Government, with the legislature to place President George M Weah picture on the 1000 LD component of the new Liberian dollar bank notes. Since nothing was done adequately to verify the information from the senate, the radio discussion at the time has the propensity to create negative public perception against the senate.

From a policy perspective, and in line with ethical standards, Gibah and Darzee should have done justice by just reaching out to the senate. Though, Mr Gibah exhibited a text message indicating that he was seeking response from the president pro-tempore of the Liberian senate on the issue of placing president George weah's picture on the 1000 LD new bank notes, a one-time request was not adequate to serve as justification to bring the Pro-tempore into the printing of money discussion only to reference different issue which is the last year recording on budgetary allocation.

Professionally, objectivity was also, not fully applied by the rest of the stations involved in playing the audio of the president pro-tempore. Objective from the perspective of the PUL code of ethics requires the capacity to suppress broadcaster's own prejudices in order to examine given facts from varied perspectives. Also fairness was not fully observed. Fairness, according to

journalistic principles demands that all sides to a story are given equal opportunity for presentation.

It requires an honest treatment of all sides taking into account their special needs and concerns. Fairness demands that journalists actively seek out those who are affected or are likely to be affected directly or in-directly by a story. The principle of fairness is undermined where the perspective of an interested party which with diligent effort could have been obtained is ignored.

Another element of fairness is the need to offer persons whose interests were inadvertently ignored or misrepresented in a story the opportunity to state their case at their earliest opportunity.

Meanwhile, the PUL has warned Journalists Gibah and Darzee and urged them to stop playing the old recording on the president pro-tempore. The PUL is also warning the rest of the stations involved in playing the distorted version of the audio to desist. Violators will be deal with in line with the PUL code of ethics. The PUL is admonishing all journalists to always conform to best journalistic practice.

Article 3 of the PUL code of ethics requires that the public's right to quality, accurate, balanced and fair information which is a fundamental democratic right should not be ignored by journalists. It is therefore non-negotiable and cannot be circumvented.

This provision places dual responsibility on the media. First, it enjoins the media to honor public's right to information to enable them participate actively in the governance of the nation. Second, and deriving from the first responsibility, it places an injunction on the media not to conceal information from the public.

Finally, the PUL welcomed the decision of the office of the president pro-tempore of the senate to seek redress through the PUL.

Respectfully submitted by the investigative panel.



Charles B. Coffey Jr,

President of the Press Union of Liberia on behalf of the investigative panel/ PUL leadership

