

PRESS RELEASE

TWO COMPLAINTS CONCLUDED

29th March, 2007

The Independent Media Commission has concluded two complaints lodged by the Commissioners of the IMC and the Ministry of Defence respectively.

First Complaint

Independent Media Commission versus Mr. Mohamed Koroma, Managing Editor, *African Champion*

The Commission invited Messrs Mohamed Koroma and Adonis Abboud to clear the air about two articles published in the editions of *The African Champion* of Wednesday 21st March 2007 and Thursday 22nd March 2007 respectively. The first article was headlined **Adonis Abboud bribes IMC for Radio Licence** while the second was captioned **Adonis Abboud not qualified to run a radio station in Salone – How Adonis Abboud Infiltrated Sierra Leone.**

The first article claimed that the IMC acted ultra vires the laws of Sierra Leone by granting Mr. Adonis Abboud the right to establish and maintain a radio station when he is an alien. It further stated that to get the licence, Mr. Abboud **bribed the IMC with a satellite dish.**

The second article stated that just as **Jesus Christ was betrayed and sold for thirty pieces of silver coins by his own disciples, so Sierra Leone seems to have been sold for a satellite dish by the IMC whose Commissioners also received a satellite dish each from Mr. Adonis Abboud.**

The Chairman of the Complaints Committee explained that the Commission had invited Mr. Abboud to the hearing to tell the Committee whether he had at any time given any satellite dishes to the IMC and the Commissioners. Mr. Abboud replied in the negative, adding that he applied for his licence and got it through the procedures laid down by the Commission and gave no favour to anyone. He stressed that in fact he was not an alien, but a naturalized citizen of Sierra Leone since 1986.

When asked to substantiate his allegations, Mr. Koroma could not, nor could he name the “highly placed IMC official” that he alleged in the article as his source. Mr. Abboud was at that point requested to leave.

The Commissioners vehemently condemned the references to the IMC in both articles as false, defamatory and malicious, deliberately published by the newspaper to tarnish the good image and reputation they had built for themselves over the years. They then went on to avail Mr. Mohamed Koroma with the facts of the procedure followed in the award of a licence to Mr. Abboud to operate Capitol Radio which procedure they pointed out is the same for all other applicants. Copies of relevant documents to substantiate the fact that Mr. Adonis Abboud fulfilled all the conditions necessary for the award of a radio station were showed to the editor and photocopies were given to him.

Mr. Koroma apologized to the Commission for publishing what he himself termed as FALSE, INAPPROPRIATE AND DEFAMATORY and promised to publish an apology and retraction in the Monday 2nd April edition of his newspaper.

The proceedings were witnessed by an official from the London based Article 19, Ms Cece Fadope and Mr. Abdulai Sesay of Freedom of Information Act Coalition, who were visiting the Commission.

SECOND COMPLAINT

Ministry of Defence against Mr. Paul Kamara, Managing Editor of *For Di People*

The Ministry of Defence had sent a letter to the IMC complaining about an article published in *For di People* of 15th March 2007, which was headlined **Playing Pranks with Words.**

According to the complaint, *For Di People* did not publish the Ministry’s Press Release issued to the media on the death of Capt. Kelfala Kamara, but came out with an article out rightly dismissing it, describing it as confusing, misleading and a blatant attempt to hide the truth. The letter pointed out that the lady involved in the shooting incident (Jattu Kamara) is the legal wife of the late Captain Kamara and not the corporal, as the newspaper paper had insinuated.

The Complaints Committee patiently listened to arguments by the two parties with regard to the publication and observed as follows:

- That *For Di People* should have published the Press Release issued by the Ministry of Defence alongside the commentary on it, to give the public both sides of the story.
- *For Di People* did nothing wrong in investigating the story and commenting on the press release, but should have cross-checked with the military, the information it received from other sources, especially the counter information about the relationship between the deceased and Mrs. Jattu Kamara
- The Public Relations Office of the Ministry of Defence should be more open with the media, so that they feel disposed to contact them for information at all times.

At the end of the deliberations, the Managing Editor of *For Di People*, Mr. Paul Kamara agreed to publish future press releases of the Ministry, especially those on the fallen Captain Kelfala Kamara, which issue the Ministry of Defence has indicated was still being investigated.

Commissioner Bernadette P. Cole	-	Chairperson
Commissioner Ade P. Bell	-	Member
Commissioner Anthony Brewah	-	Member
Commissioner Cassandra Davies	-	Member
Commissioner Francis L. Davies	-	Member
Commissioner Christo Johnson	-	Member
Commissioner Dr. Abu Bakarr Kargbo	-	Member
Commissioner Patricia Macauley	-	Member