

Network of Concerned Historians		NCH		
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2024		107	Sierra Leone	Chernoh Alpha Bah

Announcement

A group of academics has organized an open letter in support of Sierra Leonean historian and journalist Chernoh Alpha Bah, living in exile in the United States, after he received death threats.

You can sign the letter [here](#).

Below is a NCH summary of the case, followed by the text of the open letter.

Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

NCH SUMMARY

Since April 2021, Chernoh Alpha Bah, then a PhD candidate in history and from 2023 a postdoctoral fellow specializing in medical, legal, and economic history at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., United States, was subjected to attacks and threats, including death threats, from members of the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party and from supporters of President Julius Maada Bio. The attacks stemmed from articles written or co-authored by Bah for online newspaper Africanist Press, which exposed financial crimes and corruption in Sierra Leone. Bah’s PhD focused on the history of prison labor and public health in Sierra Leone from the time of British occupation through the end of the twentieth century. The attacks prevented Bah, living in exile in the United States, from returning to Sierra Leone to carry out additional archival and oral history research.

Sources:

“[Letter of Support for Chernoh Alpha M. Bah, PhD](#)” (no date [July 2024]);

Matthew Anderson & Mark Feldman, “[Academics Condemn Attacks on Sierra Leone’s Endangered Historian and Journalist](#)” (15 July 2024).

OPEN LETTER

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeOP9Tj34-Y-tGxVI2LhwyCM3bQmmDZme3nmVG2OXjZqdE6Aw/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0&pli=1>

Letter of Support for Chernoh Alpha M. Bah, PhD

This form allows you to sign the open letter of support for Dr. Chernoh Alpha M. Bah. The full text of the letter is below. If you'd like to see the version with signatures, it is available here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Hc6j8iyDMvSnWgeKlJHKs0fV9ueHL3esjuxokDZ9F4E/edit?usp=sharing>

Academics in Support of Chernoh Alpha M. Bah, PhD

Since early 2022, Dr. Chernoh Alpha M. Bah, then a PhD candidate in history at Northwestern University and now a Postdoctoral Fellow, has been subjected to persistent personal attacks and threats from members of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party and from people claiming to speak on behalf of the Sierra Leonean president and government.

These attacks have stemmed from articles Dr. Bah has written or co-authored for *Africanist Press*, an online newspaper (africanistpress.com) focusing primarily on African political and economic issues, especially in Sierra Leone. He has also been interviewed about his investigative reports on KPFA radio and elsewhere, and his research has been covered by the BBC, Radio France Internationale, Deutsche Welle, and other outlets.[1] The Committee to Protect Journalists and other NGOs have detailed Bah's situation and called for Sierra Leonean authorities to denounce the escalating rhetoric.[2] The attacks—which have included death threats—have had a profound effect on Dr. Bah's ability to continue his academic research. Dr. Bah's PhD focused on the history of prison labor and public health in Sierra Leone from the time of British occupation through the end of the twentieth century. Not only have the attacks on Dr. Bah absorbed a tremendous amount of his time, but also they have prevented him from returning to Sierra Leone to carry out additional archival and oral history research that is necessary for him to revise his work.

His experiences constitute a clear assault on journalistic freedom. They also go to the heart of principles of academic freedom. Dr. Bah is both a scholar and an investigative journalist. He needs to be able to carry out his postdoctoral research in his home country without hindrance.

We, the undersigned, call on the government of Sierra Leone and other political leaders in the country to extend all reasonable guarantees of safety from harm that could result from Dr. Bah's pursuit of his research.

[1] KPFA: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8Y6fEJaaDw>

RFI: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220108235443/https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20210311-first-lady-at-centre-of-graft-allegations-rocking-sierra-leone-presidency-julius-maada-bio>

BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w172x1gz74lkr2j>

DW: <https://www.dw.com/en/africalink-on-air-23-february-2021/audio-56665628>

[2] <https://cpj.org/2022/05/sierra-leone-publisher-chernoh-alpha-bah-threatened-with-death-charges-of-treason/>