

Nigerian security forces fire on journalists, protesters

Nigerian authorities should investigate attacks by security forces on journalists at a recent protest in Abuja, and hold those responsible to account, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



Demonstrators are seen outside the Department of State Services headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria, on November 12, 2019. Police fired on and attacked journalists covering that demonstration. Credit: CPJ/AFP/Kola Sulaimon.

On November 12, security forces fired live rounds to disperse a group of demonstrators at the Department of State Services (DSS) headquarters in Abuja, the capital, and shot at journalists and beat at least one reporter, according to journalists who spoke with CPJ, [news reports](#), and [a video](#) of the protest uploaded to YouTube by the International Centre for Investigative Reporting.

Demonstrators gathered at the DSS building to call for the release of Omoyele Sowore, a political activist and founder of the *Sahara Reporters* news website, according to those reports. No one was shot in the incident, according to the journalists who spoke to CPJ.

"There is absolutely no justification for security officers to shoot at or attack journalists working to cover a protest," said Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa program coordinator, in Washington, D.C. "Nigerian authorities must investigate allegations that Department of State Services agents targeted journalists doing their job, and hold those responsible to account."

Stanley Ugochukwu, a camera operator with the privately owned Arise Television broadcaster, told CPJ via phone that he ran to hide when security forces began firing their guns, and said a DSS agent grabbed him, confiscated his camera, and

threatened to shoot him. He said he was able to reclaim his camera when the officer began to beat another journalist, Oludare Richards. Ugochukwu told CPJ he was not injured during the incident.

Richards, a reporter with Nigeria's privately owned *The Guardian* newspaper, told CPJ over the phone that three DSS officers hit him in the head and across his body with sticks. He said he repeatedly identified himself as a journalist, but said the officers continued to beat him. Richards ran from the officers as they shot live rounds at the ground near his feet, he said.

Richards told CPJ he experienced bleeding and swelling from his head and went to a local hospital, where he was given painkillers.

Senami Kojah, a news editor with *Sahara Reporters*, told CPJ over the phone that she was covering the demonstration when a car rammed into the protesters, which prompted journalists to run toward the DSS officers for protection.

"When journalists ran toward the DSS, instead of the DSS protecting them, the DSS opened fire on us and we had to scamper for safety," Kojah said.

"At first they were shooting at journalists and protesters, and then they were shooting in the air," she said, adding that she did not see anyone be hit by a bullet.

Lucy Elukpo Ateko, a photojournalist with *The Guardian*, told CPJ over the phone that she ran for her life when DSS officers opened fire. Ateko, who is pregnant, said she went to a hospital after the incident and said doctors told her to avoid stress.

CPJ called and texted Peter Afunaya, a DSS spokesperson, but he did not answer. On November 13, Afunaya claimed that security forces had not fired live rounds at protesters, according to local [news reports](#). He said that officers dispersed the protest after demonstrators attempted to enter the DSS headquarters, according to those reports.

Sowore was arrested on August 3 for allegedly planning the #RevolutionNow protests that were held in Nigeria on August 5, as [CPJ reported](#) at the time. Police beat and arrested journalists covering those protests, according to CPJ's reporting.

CPJ is unable to confirm a connection between Sowore's arrest and his journalism, but continues to investigate the case.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>