



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

September 17, 2013

H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
Executive Mansion
Capitol Hill, Monrovia Republic of Liberia

Dear President Sirleaf:

We are taking the extraordinary step of writing you personally today to encourage you to free a valued friend and partner of this university — Rodney Sieh, publisher of FrontPage Africa.

There are several arguments to be made on Mr. Sieh's behalf, and I am confident you have heard them. We now hope you will consider these entreaties -- which together make for a strong case for Mr. Sieh's immediate release -- and rethink the unfortunate message Liberia is sending the world by imprisoning this young journalist. It is a message much at odds with what has been up to now your country's well-deserved reputation as a protector of democracy and free speech. Your Nobel acceptance speech in 2011 voiced values we could not have said any better ourselves.

Syracuse University includes the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, one of the nation's pre-eminent colleges for journalism education, and a school that is deeply committed to freedom of the press and freedom of expression. For the past several years, a number of our professors and students have traveled to Liberia, where they have helped Mr. Sieh and others train Liberia's current (and next) generation of journalists. We are so proud of this effort — and therefore doubly distressed to learn that Mr. Sieh has been jailed.

This action seems extreme and unjustified. After reading the recent Op-Ed in the New York Times, and the rebuttal from your own Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism, we believe this situation deserves reconsideration. The imprisonment of Mr. Sieh most certainly does not meet international standards for a free and fair press.

The highly regarded journalism advocacy group, the Committee to Protect Journalists, states in its letter to you dated Sept. 2, 2013, that the Republic of Liberia should "decriminalize defamation; adopt monetary damages for libel commensurate with the harm done and within limits Liberians can afford; and halt the incarceration of defendants unable to pay." We concur. Further, this position complements the Tabletop Mountain Declaration you signed in 2012, agreeing to the abolition of the criminal defamation and "insult laws."

CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT

It is unfortunate that despite these carefully crafted agreements, a journalist and his newspaper have been silenced.

Mr. Sieh has been doing very beneficial work in Liberia. We understand, of course, that when the ills of a society are uncovered it is sometimes painful and there is a tendency to want to "kill the messenger" to prevent those messages from being disseminated. However, a true democracy must safeguard the rights of journalists to tell these stories without fear of retribution. It is clear that Mr. Sieh is passionate about his country and his goal is to push for change and nurture hope in Liberia —not to the contrary, as the Minister of Information suggested.

I know that Liberia has been held up as the standard for freedom of expression and development as part of this year's Forbes 400 Philanthropy Summit in New York. You have done so much to move your country forward and you have much of which to be proud. Now, I ask that you live up to your own aspirations as well as your past accomplishments.

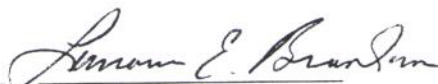
Please consider either releasing Rodney Sieh or suspending his jail sentence until you can rectify the inconsistencies of his imprisonment with your international signatory obligations and actions on the ground.

It is our hope that that you will do the right thing for Liberia and for Mr. Sieh, by stepping in to send the right message to your citizens and Mr. Sieh's partners and friends around the world who are watching. There can be no real and true Democracy in your country without a free and unfettered press. The release of Mr. Sieh is an important step in that direction.

Sincerely,



Nancy Cantor
Chancellor and
President



Lorraine E. Branham
Dean, S.I. Newhouse School of
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Mike Davis
Alexia Tsairis Chair for
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