



Call for Applications: West and Central Africa Digital Rights & Online Freedom of Expression Litigation Surgery

July 2021, Online Learning and Webinar

[Media Defence](#) is calling for applications from lawyers based in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and the DRC to participate in a forthcoming litigation surgery on the right to freedom of expression, digital rights and the Internet.

Successful applicants will be provided with online learning materials and then be invited to two discussion sessions on **22 and 23 July 2021**. Participants will become active members of a digital rights legal network through which there will be opportunity for engagement regionally and internationally.

All applicants are required to submit for discussion a current or potential case relating to freedom of expression. If applicants do not have a case, they may submit a relevant law, practice or policy relating to digital rights or freedom of expression that they would like to challenge in court.

Litigation surgery objectives

Media Defence provides legal support to journalists, bloggers and independent media. In recent years, Media Defence has supported a significant number of cases involving online media. These have included challenging social media blocking and Internet shutdowns, contesting cybercrimes legislation, 'false news' and intermediary liability, as well as calling for greater protections for online privacy and source protection.

Specifically, the objectives of the litigation surgery are:

- To equip participants with skills and knowledge to litigate using national and international laws as well as regional and international mechanisms relevant to freedom of expression online;
- To build a digital rights network and help facilitate its engagement with international legal mechanisms and global civil society initiatives; and
- To assist and develop working relationships amongst lawyers undertaking such cases.

The litigation surgery will do this through a combination of online learning through presentations and materials along with two online discussion sessions for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing.

Criteria for eligibility

Participants will be selected on the following criteria:

- The surgery is open to lawyers who work and reside countries in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and the DRC;
- Applicants can either be working in private practice or be working for or be affiliated with NGOs promoting the right to freedom of expression in West and Central Africa through litigation. Exceptionally strong applications from lawyers who have not yet undertaken freedom of expression work, but have experience litigating other human rights cases and have a strong interest in undertaking freedom of expression work will be considered as well. A maximum of 12 participants will be selected;
- Applicants must be proficient in French;
- They must have a demonstrated interest in and/or knowledge of the right to online freedom of expression, digital rights, internet freedom and/or related issues;
- The lawyers must have a demonstrated interest in and/or knowledge of international and regional human rights law;
- With their application, applicants are requested to submit a case study of a case that they are litigating or intend to litigate and that could be discussed during the litigation surgery. As set out above, it will suffice for participants who do not have a case that is pending to have identified a relevant law, practice or policy relating to online freedom of expression that they would like to challenge in court. However, such participants must demonstrate their ability and willingness to pursue the case after the surgery;
- The cases submitted must involve a violation of the fundamental right to freedom of expression online;
- The following non-exhaustive list of themes are a guide for the type of cases that could be submitted with the application:
 - Cybercrime laws;
 - Intermediary liability;
 - Internet shutdowns;
 - Restriction of online media;
 - Online privacy;
 - National security; and
 - Anonymity online.

Media Defence is committed to advancing equality and diversity and will therefore consider gender, age and country of origin in its selection of participants.

How to apply

Please complete the attached application form and submit it to Hannah Stoate at hannah.stoate@mediadefence.org. The deadline is **1 June 2021**.

For information about how Media Defence will use and protect your data, please see our [privacy policy](#).

Deadline for applications: 1 June 2021

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a litigation surgery?

A litigation surgery is a focused seminar where participants are able to present a case they are working on to peers and experts and have a discussion about the case. The surgery's focus is on preliminary problem identification, framing of violations, formulation of human rights arguments and remedies. The surgeries also provide an in-depth understanding of strategic litigation and litigating before regional and international human rights bodies.

Q: I am not a lawyer but I am interested, can I apply?

Litigation surgeries are only open to practicing lawyers. Very rare exceptions will be made for lawyers who are not in practice or other people providing legal assistance to civil society organisations that work on the right to freedom of expression.

Q: What is the purpose of a litigation surgery?

Litigation surgeries are intended to be a space for litigators to receive technical legal expertise on the relevant thematic issues. It is also a space for litigators to network and find out what other litigators in West and Central Africa are working on.

Q: Where must surgery participants be from?

This call for applications relates to Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and the DRC. Only lawyers who reside and practice in this region are eligible to apply. Legal advisors based in the global north who provide assistance to lawyers working in domestic courts are not eligible to apply; their local partners should apply.

Q: How many participants will be at the litigation surgery?

12 participants will be selected for the litigation surgery. There will also be two members of Media Defence's Legal Team, the Training Manager and an external facilitator.

Q: Who pays for the costs of participation?

Media Defence will cover the costs of data with a per diem.

Q: Is there any follow-up?

Media Defence plans to help facilitate a network of lawyers who are interested and active in defending digital rights and online freedom of expression cases. Further details will be provided during the litigation surgery.

In addition, Media Defence's lawyers will discuss with participants how Media Defence can assist with their cases and provide follow-up. Media Defence will also discuss the possibility of providing further assistance to the freedom of expression cases participants work on after the surgery, either by way of providing ad hoc legal support or by way of partnerships. As Media Defence is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to providing legal defence to journalists, bloggers and independent media across the world through its networks, it is always interested in following up on participants' cases and working with participants on cases in the future.