



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

OVERVIEW OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

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DefendDefenders' Bi-Annual Report to the ACHPR

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Introduction and Executive Summary

Respect for democracy, rule of law and human rights in the sub region continues to be tested by the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to deliberate government actions aimed at curtailing democratic and civic space. During this period, governments in the sub region misused laws, regulations, and directives geared at curbing the spread of the pandemic to steer abusive political agendas. There were increased reports of violations of the rights to freedoms of opinion and expression, association, and peaceful assembly. States are cautioned that all restrictions to prevent the further spread of coronavirus must be temporary, lawful, non-discriminatory, strictly necessary, and proportionate.

Additionally, this period witnessed government changes in several countries. In Tanzania, President John Pombe Magufuli passed away in March 2021. Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as new President, promising reforms towards press freedom, due process, a scientific approach to COVID-19, and an open foreign policy. Other countries in East Africa conducted elections in processes that were criticised as not free or fair. Uganda, Djibouti and Tanzania went to the polls that saw the incumbent respective heads of states re-elected to office in flawed processes. In the case of Djibouti, the election process and operations completely lacked credibility. The political climate in these countries was reported as restrictive with infringements on press freedom and political opponents harassed. This statement illustrates key infringements on democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Burundi has been in a state of political, human rights, and humanitarian crisis since April 2015. Grave human rights violations and abuses have been documented, affecting a range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The environment for civic space and human rights defenders (HRDs) remains restrictive. With the May 2020 elections, the sudden passing of President Pierre Nkurunziza, and the swearing in of a new President, Évariste Ndayishimiye, in June 2020, there was hope that the country would change course, but these hopes are yet to materialise. Recent months have witnessed positive signs, for instance the authorities' release of detained journalists. Burundi and its partners may now attempt to normalise relations; however, the human rights situation remains serious.

Djibouti and **Eritrea** remain closed authoritarian regimes, ranking among the most repressive for freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and for HRDs in Africa. In Djibouti, the political scene is closed with no short-term prospects for change. This was evident again in the April 2021 presidential election, which saw the re-election of President Ismail Omar Guelleh with over 98% of the vote. Eritrea remains under the dictatorial rule of President Isaias Afwerki, with no opposition parties or independent civil society organisations. Grave violations continue to be reported with complete impunity. Since November 2020, concerns have been mounting over Eritrean forces' involvement in Ethiopia's Tigray region and possible crimes under international law they may have committed against civilians, and attacks against Eritrean refugees and refugee camps.

The human rights situation in **Ethiopia** deteriorated during the reporting period as armed conflict continued in Tigray. Some of the violations, committed by all parties to the conflict, including attacks against civilians and ethnic cleansing, may amount to crimes under international law. The government restricted the freedom of expression and access to information by shutting down the internet and closing phone lines. The conflict has the potential to destabilise the country and threaten progress registered since April 2018, including regarding civic space. In March 2021, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights (OHCHR) and Ethiopia's national human rights commission (EHRC) announced a joint investigation into violations, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed acknowledged that atrocities took place. These important steps towards truth must be followed by further steps to achieve justice and accountability.

Kenya, a multi-party democracy, continues to grapple with violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture, often committed by security forces in the name of combating terrorism or against the youth from disadvantaged slum areas. Although civil society enjoys a space that is broader than in most of Kenya's neighbours, HRDs working on specific topics, including business and human rights, indigenous peoples, and sexual orientation and gender identity, face threats. Restrictive laws, including Cybercrime Act 2018, are used to target activists, politicians, journalists, and bloggers that are critical of authorities.

In **Rwanda**, avenues for peaceful dissent remain largely closed. Severe restrictions on the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly, and association, are in place. Political parties, civil society organisations, and the media are under intense pressure. The government continues to target, harass, arrest, and intimidate journalists, activists and HRDs.

Tensions continue to raise in **Somalia**, and the security situation remains precarious. Grave human rights violations continue with impunity. Terrorist group Al Shabab retains control over parts of the territory and commits grave abuses through armed attacks. Journalists are targeted by both state and non-state actors through defamation and use of national security provisions of the Penal Code. Several have been arbitrarily arrested and detained, and one killed during the reporting period. The country is now in a political deadlock, as political factions have failed to agree on the election process. In February 2021, President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo's" term ended with no clear path toward national elections.

South Sudan continues to face active fighting in parts of the country, and myriads of local-level and intercommunal violence threaten to spiral out of control and destabilise the country. South Sudan remains one of the most restrictive countries in the East and Horn of Africa sub-region. It is dangerous for civil activists and journalists to voice their opinions. Patterns of sexual violence, grave violations, and international crimes continue to be reported, including deliberate targeting and starvation of civilians. Justice and accountability remain elusive.

During the reporting period, **Sudan** continued to take steps to open the democratic and civic space, and to improve respect for women's and girls' rights. In February 2021, Sudan announced that it would accede to the Conventions against Torture (UNCAT) and on Enforced Disappearance (CED). As UNAMID ceased its operations, the humanitarian situation remains serious. Violence against civilians and intercommunal violence have been increasing, especially in West Darfur. Concerns also remain over the influence of the military and security forces both within the executive and the economy. Accountability for the violations and abuses committed under the former regime, both in Khartoum on 3 June 2019, and in other parts of the country, including conflict and former conflict areas of Darfur, Blue Nile, the Eastern Region, and South Kordofan, over the last three decades, remains elusive. However, in February 2021, Sudan, and the International Criminal Court (ICC) signed a cooperation agreement on Ali Al-Kushayb's trial. The UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) is now operational.

Over the last five years, **Tanzania** slid towards authoritarianism. The re-election of President John Magufuli, in October 2020, came against the backdrop of a series of repressive laws and

extra-legal measures used by the government to restrict the space for independent actors. Several political opposition members were subjected to physical attacks. Fear and self-censorship rose as media houses saw their licenses suspended or revoked, HRDs were detained, lawyers disbarred, and human rights NGOs targeted. Post-election repression was denounced by international actors. The sudden passing of President Magufuli, in March 2021, and the swearing in of President Samia Suluhu Hassan, offers hope. In early speeches, President Hassan indicated that she intended to uphold freedom of expression and due process and to address the COVID-19 pandemic. She also ordered the Information Ministry to lift the ban on all media outlets that were suspended or punished.

During **Uganda**'s election period, political opposition members and supporters, journalists, and activists were targeted. There was a spike in targeted attacks against HRDs, journalists, and opposition members. Electoral violence rose during party primaries. The election results were contested. Several journalists reporting on the election were arrested and beaten. As many as 430 political opposition supporters may have been abducted and some tortured. The government dispersed peaceful protests using excessive and unwarranted violence and arresting protestors. Ugandan citizens' rights to freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association are increasingly under pressure. The country, however, remains a hub for HRDs in the sub-region. A law on the protection of HRDs is currently under consideration by the Parliament.

Recommendations

In light of the updates and trends observed, DefendDefenders makes the following recommendations for action by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights:

- Call on all member States to ensure the protection of human rights defenders, notably by observing the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;
- Call on all member States to adopt specific legislative measures to recognise and protect the status of HRDs, and provide a working environment conducive for civil society, as per Res. 376 (LX) 2017 adopted by the Commission during its 60th Ordinary Session Niamey, Niger;
- Call on member States to cease the harassment and arbitrary detention of marginalised HRDs, including those working on LGBT rights;
- Call on the Government on Burundi to implement all relevant resolutions, including ACHPR/Res. 396 (LXII) 2018, and continue to monitor and report on human rights violations in Burundi, and engage in efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in Burundi in all relevant fora;
- Support the government of South Sudan to immediately establish and operationalise the Hybrid Court for South Sudan and other transitional justice institutions as per Chapter V of the Revitalised Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS), and to ensure accountability for crimes committed since 2013;
- Call on the government of Ethiopia to allow and facilitate investigations into violations committed by all parties to the conflict in Tigray, as per the agreement signed between the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and Ethiopia's Human Rights Commission; ensure protection of civilians; and allow full and unhindered humanitarian access to the Tigray region; as well as protect independent civil society actors;

- Call on President Samia Suluhu Hassan’s government to implement press freedom reforms, uphold the rule of law and due process, and follow a scientific approach to COVID-19 in full respect for human rights;
- Call on States to abide by the Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly adopted by the Commission during its 60th ordinary session;
- Call on all member States who have not done so to deposit the declaration under article 34 (6) of the protocol of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights to allow individuals and NGOs to directly submit their cases to the court

Burundi

General information

Since President Évariste Ndayishimiye replaced Pierre Nkurunziza, there was hope for change, however human rights violations continued to be carried out in Burundi. On 6 October 2020, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) extended the Commission of Inquiry (CoI’s) mandate for 12 months.¹ On 15 October, a group of 15 Burundian civil society organisations (CSOs) sent a letter to the heads of states of the International Conference for the Great Lakes region, calling for increased involvement in peacebuilding in Burundi.² On 20 October, Burundi advanced towards normalising relations with Rwanda, when foreign ministers from both countries met at the border.³ Other states, including European Union members and other development partners, signalled their intention to move toward normalisation of relations with Burundi; however, a number of them continue to insist on the need for Burundi to improve its human rights record as a condition for full resumption of pre-2015 relations.

On 18 December 2020, Pierre Buyoya, the former president of Burundi, died after contracting Covid-19 in Mali.⁴ He was convicted in absentia by the Supreme Court of Burundi for his

¹ DefendDefenders, “Burundi: after new UN resolution, the government should resume cooperation”, 6 October 2020, <https://defenddefenders.org/burundi-after-new-un-resolution-the-government-should-resume-cooperation/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

² Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society, “Burundi: Letter from Burundian Civil Society to the Heads of State of the ICGLR” 15 October 2020, <https://forscburundi.org/burundi-lettre-de-la-scb-aux-chefs-detat-de-la-cirgl-15-sept-2020/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

³ BBC, “Burundi and Rwanda move closer to normalising relations”, 20 October 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-africa-47639452?ns_mchannel=social&ns_source=twitter&ns_campaign=bbc_live&ns_linkname=5f8eedaac898d102e4444b95%26Burundi%20and%20Rwanda%20move%20closer%20to%20normalising%20relations%262020-10-20T14%3A37%3A02%2B00%3A00&ns_fee=0&pinned_post_locator=urn:asset:56ece443-46c2-4159-9009-f91b492be1e8&pinned_post_asset_id=5f8eedaac898d102e4444b95&pinned_post_type=share, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴ Daily Monitor, “Buyoya is gone but peace in Burundi is still elusive”, 25 December 2020, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/commentary/buyoya-is-gone-but-peace-in-burundi-is-still-elusive-3239320>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

alleged role in the 1993 murder of his successor, Melchior Ndadaye, two months before his death.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Although the right to freedom of opinion and expression remains restricted, the Burundian authorities have taken some steps to improve the situation. On 22 October 2020, DefendDefenders and 64 other CSOs called for the immediate and unconditional release of the four arbitrarily detained Iwacu journalists, Christine Kamikazi, Agnès Ndirubusa, Egide Harerimana, and Tércence Mpozenzi.⁵ The journalists were found guilty of breaching state security. On 23 December 2020, the journalists were freed following a presidential pardon,⁶ after spending 430 days in jail.

On 22 February 2021, the Burundian government lifted sanctions on Bonesha radio station,⁷ following a dialogue between the National Communication Council (CNC) and the media outlet owners. President Ndayishimiye called on the CNC to discuss reopening the media house after it was banned in 2015, allegedly for playing a role in the failed coup.

Freedom of association

Human rights defenders (HRDs) have faced numerous obstacles because of their activism. They are persistently targeted by the authorities. On 2 February 2021, Burundi's Supreme Court announced its ruling sentencing 12 exiled HRDs to life in prison.⁸ The Supreme Court made its decision on 23 June 2020, seven months before the announcement. The 12 were accused of attempting a coup against former President Nkurunziza. The trial and sentencing happened in absence of the accused.

In another case, the Burundian Supreme Court ordered a re-trial for HRD and anti-torture campaigner Germain Rukuki, who is currently serving a 32-year prison sentence.⁹ The court

⁵ Amnesty International, "Burundi: Sixty-five organizations call for immediate release of Iwacu journalists", 22 October 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR1632442020ENGLISH.pdf>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶ Voice Of America, "Burundi Journalists released via presidential pardon", 24 December 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/burundi-journalists-released-presidential-pardon>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷ The East African, "Burundi lifts sanctions on local radio station", 22 February 2021, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/burundi-lifts-sanction-on-radio-station-3300402>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸ Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture, "HALTE À LA RÉPRESSION DES DÉFENSEURS DES DROITS HUMAINS ET DES JOURNALISTES !", 10 March 2021, https://www.acatfrance.fr/appele-urgent/halte-a-la-repression-des-defenseurs-des-droits-humains-et-des-journalistes-?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=au_burundi_repression_ddh_et_journalistes, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹ BBC, "Burundi: Germain Rukuki Returns to Court for Confession", 24 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/gahuza/56515858>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

rendered invalid the July 2019 Appeal Court decision to uphold Germain Rukuki's conviction and prison sentence, and sent the appeal case back to be heard again by the Ntahangwa Appeal Court, with a newly composed bench.¹⁰ This was based on procedural irregularities. Rukuki was charged for "threatening state security" and taking part in an "insurrectional movement." On 20 November 2020, Amnesty International launched a letter writing campaign¹¹ to bring attention and action to Rukuki's case.

Djibouti

General information

Djibouti's presidential election took place on 9 April 2021.¹² President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh has been in power since 1999 and ran for a fifth term. The current regime has consistently suppressed opposition parties, members, and supporters, as well as independent media and actors. Djibouti faces little criticism for human rights violations from the international community due to the country's strategic location in the Horn of Africa and its hosting of military bases for the USA, China, France, Spain, and Japan. The opposition claimed they would boycott the upcoming election in March 2021, citing a lack of fairness and transparency as the reason.¹³ In practice, there was no level playing field, and while opposition candidates ran, they could not possibly hope to challenge President Guelleh on a fair basis.

On 14 January 2021, reports suggested that two people died in clashes between an armed group and military in northeastern Djibouti.¹⁴ The Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD), a radical faction in northern Djibouti who were against the reelection of President Guelleh, allegedly attacked several different sites, including a military camp.

¹⁰ See DefendDefenders *et al.*, "Burundi: Vital role of the Commission of Inquiry in prompting meaningful human rights progress," 20 August 2020, <https://defenddefenders.org/burundi-vital-role-of-the-commission-of-inquiry-in-prompting-meaningful-human-rights-progress/> (footnote 3), Accessed 13 April 2021.

¹¹ Amnesty International, "Burundi: Global campaign to free Germain Rukuki launched today", 20 November 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/burundi-global-campaign-to-free-germain-rukuki/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹² African Center for Strategic Studies, "Taking Stock of Africa's 2021 Elections", 12 January 2021, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2021-elections/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹³ Alliance Des Forces Progressistes Pour L'Afrique, "DJIBOUTI and TCHAD: same fight against dictators", 3 March 2021, <https://afpafricaine.org/djibouti-et-tchad-meme-combat-contre-les-dictateurs/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁴ RFI, "Djibouti: outbreak of violence in the northeast of the country", 15 January 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210115-djibouti-flambée-de-violences-dans-le-nord-ouest-du-pays>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

On 10 April 2021, officials announced that incumbent President Ismael Guelleh won the election with over 98% of the votes.¹⁵ His opponent Zakaria Farah won about 2% of the votes. The opposition criticised the election for being unfair. Farah claimed his delegates were prevented from entering polling stations. The officials observing from the African Union (AU) stated that everything was going on “well and calmly” despite the absence of the opposition delegate. The observation mission did not investigate the electoral context and the civic and democratic space environment; it contented itself with observing electoral operations on the day of the poll. It met with opposition representatives, however.

Freedom of opinion and expression

In Djibouti, the right to freedom of opinion and expression continues to be severely curtailed. The only independent media outlet, *La Voix de Djibouti* (Voice of Djibouti), continues to be targeted by the government and authorities. President Guelleh made inflammatory and inaccurate comments about *La Voix de Djibouti* in an interview with *Jeune Afrique* published on 23 November 2020.¹⁶ Reporters Without Borders (RSF) raised concerns about the impact the interview might have on *La Voix de Djibouti* as the interview undermined the media outlet and free press in general.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

During this reporting period, public protests have been rare. Djibouti’s civic space remains closed and restricted, and freedom of assembly remains restrained. Public protests remain a rare occurrence. However, Djiboutian citizens held a demonstration against the fifth term for incumbent President Ismail Omar Guelleh.¹⁷ This indicates growing frustration and anger at Djibouti’s political and public scene, as avenues for peaceful dissent and democratic change of power are closed, with no prospects for short-term change.

Eritrea

General information

The ongoing armed conflict in the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia, which borders Eritrea, continues to deteriorate. Fighting has caused a humanitarian crisis for civilians, including Eritrean refugees living in border camps on Ethiopia’s territory.¹⁸ Affected people

¹⁵ African News, “Djibouti President Guelleh wins election with 98%, provisional results”, 10 April 2021, <https://www.africanews.com/2021/04/10/djibouti-president-guelleh-wins-election-with-98-provisional-results/>, Accessed 12 April 2021. The figure was later corrected to be brought to 97.44%.

¹⁶ IFEX, “President Guelleh insults only independent media outlet operated by Djiboutian journalists” 9 December 2020, <https://ifex.org/president-guelleh-insults-only-independent-media-outlet-operated-by-djiboutian-journalists/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁷ Alliance Des Forces Progressistes Pour L’Afrique, “DJIBOUTI et TCHAD : même combat contre les dictateurs”, 3 March 2021, <http://afpafrique.org/djibouti-et-tchad-meme-combat-contre-les-dictateurs/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁸ The new Humanitarian, “Eritrean refugees cut off from aid, threatened by Ethiopia’s continuing conflict”, 30 November 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/11/30/Ethiopia-Eritrea-refugee-camps-tigray-cut-off>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

include approximately 96,000 Eritreans who are largely cut off from humanitarian supplies and assistance.

In December 2020, the presence and involvement of Eritrean troops in the Tigray region was reported,¹⁹ causing concern for the safety and rights of refugees, who fled repression by the Eritrean regime. Multiple sources have verified and confirmed reports of Eritrean refugees in Tigray being killed, abducted, and forcibly returned to Eritrea by Eritrean forces.²⁰ On 26 February 2021, Amnesty International reported that the Eritrean troops, with the acquiescence of Ethiopian forces, had murdered hundreds of citizens, including in the city of Axum in November 2020.²¹ Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted that Eritrean troops entered Tigray during the conflict in March 2021, and that atrocities had taken place.²²

Freedom of opinion and expression

According to a report released in December 2020, a record number of journalists were jailed worldwide, with 19% of the cases having no charges disclosed.²³ Alarming, Eritrea imprisoned the highest number, accounting for 16 out of 53 journalists. Some remained in incommunicado detention since 2001.²⁴

On 12 January 2021, a Swedish prosecutor announced that Sweden's judiciary would forgo the case against the Eritrean government involving a Swedish-Eritrean journalist, Dawit Isaak.²⁵ Dawit was arrested in September 2001 and has been in prison for 20 years. The prosecutor cited the low chances of an investigation leading to charges and the difficulty of conducting

¹⁹ Voice of America, "Bachelet: Violations of International Law Imperil Civilians in Ethiopia's Tigray Region", 22 December 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/bachelet-violations-international-law-imperil-civilians-ethiopia-tigray-region>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

²⁰ Voice of America, "Eritrea's Role Questioned as Reports Emerge of Its Involvement in Tigray Conflict", 8 January 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/eritreas-role-questioned-reports-emerge-its-involvement-tigray-conflict>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

²¹ Amnesty International, "ETHIOPIA: THE MASSACRE IN AXUM", 26 February 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/3730/2021/en/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

²² DW, "Ethiopia PM admits Eritrean troops were in Tigray", 23, March 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-pm-admits-eritrean-troops-were-in-tigray/a-56963424>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

²³ Committee to Protect Journalists, "Record number of journalists jailed worldwide", 15 December 2020, <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/12/record-number-journalists-jailed-imprisoned/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

²⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, "16 Journalists imprisoned in Eritrea" https://cpj.org/data/imprisoned/2020/?status=Imprisoned&charges%5B%5D=No%20charge%20disclosed&cc_fips%5B%5D=ER&start_year=2020&end_year=2020&group_by=location, Accessed 2 April 2021.

²⁵ The local, "Sweden won't open criminal case against Eritrea over journalist jailing", 12 January 2021, <https://www.thelocal.se/20210112/sweden-wont-open-criminal-case-against-eritrean-over-journalist-jailing/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

investigations in Eritrea as reasons for not pursuing the case. The reasoning, therefore, is not based on the merits of the case but rather on overwhelming practical and logistical challenges.

Freedom of association

In a positive move, the Eritrean authorities released several Christians who had been arbitrarily arrested and detained. On 7 December 2020, 28 members of the Jehovah Witnesses religious group were released after serving varying prison terms of five to 26 years. However, 24 Jehovah Witnesses members remain in prison without charges or formal trials.²⁶

On 15 January 2021, six women were freed after being imprisoned for four months for worshipping in public.²⁷ 64 more Christians were subsequently released on 10 February 2021 after being detained for up to 12 years without trial and 21 Christian women were released on 4 March 2021 after being jailed for four years.²⁸

Despite these developments, the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief remains limited. In January 2021, A Christian based website identified Eritrea as one of the most dangerous places to be a Christian.²⁹ Christians continue to be targeted and arrested, in March 2021, 23 women in Asmara and 12 women in Assab were arrested for attending a prayer meeting.³⁰

Eritrea remains among the most closed countries on the African continent. Authorities continuously violate the rights of freedom of association, opinion and expression, religion or belief, and peaceful assembly. With President Isaias Afwerki's tight grip on power, through his Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) party, and benefiting from changing dynamics in the Horn of Africa and in the Gulf regions, prospects for positive human rights change in the foreseeable future are minimal.

Ethiopia

General situation

²⁶ The chronicle herald, "Eritrea frees 28 Jehovah's Witnesses prisoners, group says", 7 December 2020, <https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/news/world/eritrea-frees-28-jehovahs-witnesses-prisoners-group-says-528264/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

²⁷ Persecution, "21 Christians Released From Prison in Eritrea", 4 March 2021, <https://www.persecution.org/2021/03/04/21-christians-released-prison-eritrea/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

²⁸ Persecution International Christian Concern, "21 Christians Released From Prison in Eritrea", 4 March 2021, <https://www.persecution.org/2021/03/04/21-christians-released-prison-eritrea/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

²⁹ Keep the Faith, "The Countries Where It's Most Dangerous to Be a Christian in 2021", 1 January 2021, <https://www.keepthefaith.co.uk/2021/01/19/the-countries-where-its-most-dangerous-to-be-a-christian-in-2021/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

³⁰ Christian News, "Eritrea military raid prayer meetings, imprison 35 Christians" 31 March 2021, <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/eritrea-military-raid-prayer-meetings-imprison-35-christians>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

The Tigray armed conflict, which started in November 2020, continues to worsen. All parties may have committed serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, including deliberate attacks against civilians, indiscriminate attacks, ethnic cleansing, mass murders, and rape and sexual violence. The UN struggled to get teams on the ground in the more remote areas of the region, and emergency aid was unable to reach two refugee camps on the Eritrean border.³¹ The UN estimates that 1.3 million people needed emergency assistance as a result of the conflict by the end of 2020,³² and over 50,000 people had fled to Sudan.

On 23 December, armed attackers killed at least 100 people in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, in Western Ethiopia. Five senior local officials were arrested in connection with the attack.³³ Fighting between ethnic communities is largely related to disputes and grievances over land, has been ongoing and is worsening.³⁴

In mid-January, multiple verified reports were received by aid workers and international media concerning an increase in sexual violence and assault in the Tigray region.³⁵

On 25 January 2021, it was reported that Eritrean forces had killed around 750 people sheltering in a cathedral complex in Axum, Tigray, and in the streets, in a massacre.³⁶ On 26 February 2021, Amnesty International released a report detailing the violations in Axum.³⁷

³¹ UNHCR, “Statement attributable to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi on the situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia’s Tigray region”, 14 January 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/1/600052064/statement-attributable-un-high-commissioner-refugees-filippo-grandi-situation.html>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

³² Reuters, “U.S. senators call for release of journalists in Ethiopia”, 13 January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-ethiopia-journalists-idUSKBN29I2L6>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

³³ Reuters, “Ethiopia arrests five senior local officials in connection with security issue in Benishangul-Gumuz region - State news agency”, 24 December 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-violence-arrest/ethiopia-arrests-five-senior-local-officials-in-connection-with-security-issue-in-benishangul-gumuz-region-state-news-agency-idUSKBN28Y0PA>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

³⁴ TRT World, “Ethiopia arrests five officials in Benishangul-Gumuz”, 25 December 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/ethiopia-arrests-five-officials-in-benishangul-gumuz-42664>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

³⁵ Reuters, “‘Choose - I kill you or rape you’: abuse accusations surge in Ethiopia's war”, 25 January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-conflict-rape-idUSKBN29U0JE>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

³⁶ Church Times, “Massacre ‘of 750’ reported in Aksum church complex, Tigray, Ethiopia”, 15 January 2021, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/15-january/news/world/massacre-of-750-reported-in-aksum-church-complex-tigray-ethiopia>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

³⁷ Amnesty International, “ETHIOPIA: THE MASSACRE IN AXUM”, 26 February 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/3730/2021/en/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

On 23 March 2021, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed acknowledged that Eritrean troops had entered Tigray during the conflict.³⁸ He recognised that atrocities had been committed, including rape and killings, and promised to act against the perpetrators. This was an important step toward truth, and possibly justice and accountability. On 25 March 2021, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) announced a joint investigation into violations and abuses,³⁹ which was described “as part of the much-needed accountability process for the victims.”

Freedom of opinion and expression

During the Tigray conflict, freedom of movement was severely limited and access to information was restricted. Journalists were banned from travelling to conflict areas⁴⁰ and internet and phone lines were shut down.⁴¹ The media blackout made it challenging for journalists to provide and verify information, and for Ethiopian citizens to access reliable information.⁴² UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, have criticised Internet shutdowns and other blanket measures as being incompatible with states’ international human rights obligations.

Concerns have been mounting over the crackdown of journalists during the conflict and its effects on press freedom. On 4 November 2020, Bekalu Alamrew, a broadcast journalist, was arrested and accused of “spreading fake news.”⁴³ He was later released from detention after being granted bail.

On 7 November 2020, authorities arrested journalist Medihane Ekubamichael, the *Addis Standard* editor, following the outlet’s reporting on the Tigray conflict.⁴⁴ Medihane was not

³⁸ DW, “Ethiopia PM admits Eritrean troops were in Tigray”, 23, March 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-pm-admits-eritrean-troops-were-in-tigray/a-56963424>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

³⁹ OHRC, “Probe announced into alleged Tigray rights violations: UN rights office” 25 March 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1088272>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

⁴⁰ Mail and Guardian, “Blackout makes it hard to report on Ethiopia’s civil war”, 16 November 2020, <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-11-16-blackout-makes-it-hard-to-report-on-ethiopias-civil-war/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴¹ The East African, “Ethiopia shuts down telephone, internet services in Tigray”, 5 November 2020, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/ethiopia-telephone-internet-services-tigray-2731442>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴² Voice of America, “For Ethiopia’s Diaspora, Seeking News Amid Communication Blackout is a Challenge”, 18 December 2020, www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopias-diaspora-seeking-news-amid-communication-blackout-challenge, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴³ Twitter, @Addisstandard, 17 November 2020, <https://twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1329809904996118528>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Ethiopian authorities arrest Addis Standard editor Medihane Ekubamichael”, 13 November 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/11/ethiopian-authorities-arrest-addis-standard-editor-medihane-ekubamichael/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

charged, but police confiscated his documents and laptop. Medihane tested positive for COVID-19 on 26 November 2020, while in detention.⁴⁵ On 10 November, three journalists from the Ethiopian Press Agency were arrested and denied access to their lawyers and family.⁴⁶

On 30 November 2020, authorities arrested the managing editor of the online news outlet *Awramba Times*, Dawit Kebede.⁴⁷ The police confiscated his cellphones, recording devices, books, and CDs. On 2 December, the police accused Dawit of disseminating inaccurate information, inciting violence, and attempting to violate the constitution in the federal first instance court. Similarly, on 24 December 2020, Kumerra Gemechu, a cameraman working for Reuters was arrested at his home.⁴⁸ His computer, flash drives, and papers were confiscated. On 30 December, his lawyer reported that Gemechu was being held in solitary confinement.⁴⁹ He was released on 5 January 2021.⁵⁰

On 21 January 2021, journalist Dawit Kedebe Araya and his friend Bereket Berhe were killed by an unidentified shooter⁵¹ in Mekelle while driving in the city. Dawit worked for Tigray Regional State TV. The reason for the attack remains unknown.

Another four journalists and media workers reporting on the Tigray conflict were arrested and detained. Between 27 February and 1 March 2021, two journalists and two translators working with *Financial Times* and *AFP* were arrested⁵² by Ethiopian soldiers in Mekelle. They were released without charges on 3 March 2021.

⁴⁵ Twitter, @Addisstandard, 27 November 2020, <https://twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1332322912762785792>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴⁶ Reporters Without Borders, “At least six Ethiopian journalists were arrested in past six days”, 29 November 2020, <https://rsf.org/en/news/least-six-ethiopian-journalists-arrested-past-six-days#:~:text=They%20are%20Haftu%20Gebreegziabher%2C%20Tsegaye.for%20the%20past%20several%20months>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists, Ethiopian journalist Dawit Kebede detained without charge since November 30, 18 December 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/12/ethiopian-journalist-dawit-kebede-detained-without-charge-since-november-30/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴⁸ Reuters, “Ethiopian police arrest Reuters cameraman”, 28 December 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-arrest-int-idUSKBN2920AI>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁴⁹ Reuters, “Reuters cameraman detained in Ethiopia has seen no evidence against him, lawyer says”, 30 December 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-arrest-idUKKBN29422X>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵⁰ Voice of America, “Ethiopian Police Release Detained Reuters Cameraman Without Charge”, 5 January 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/ethiopian-police-release-detained-reuters-cameraman-without-charge>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Reporter Dawit Kebede Araya shot and killed in Ethiopia”, 28 January 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/01/reporter-dawit-kebede-araya-shot-and-killed-in-ethiopia/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵² Committee to Protect Journalists, “Translators and journalists released without charge in Ethiopia”, 3 March 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/03/translators-and-journalists-released-without-charge-in-ethiopia/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

Freedom of association

Oromo political figure Jawar Mohammed and several other opposition leaders remain in prison since their arrests in July 2020. A group of Ethiopian lawyers called on the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to release Jawar Mohammed and other opposition leaders before the 5 June 2021 election.⁵³

On 22 January 2021, a Federal High Court Judge dropped six of the ten charges brought against Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and 22 other people.⁵⁴ The dropped charges were related to possession of illegal firearms.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

During the reporting period, a number of protests broke out. On 27 January 2021, 20 prisoners, including Bekele Gerba and Jawar Mohammed, started a 40-day hunger strike in prison to demand the release of political leaders.⁵⁵ They ended the hunger strike on 8 March 2021, following concerns, including by community leaders and religious leaders, about their health.

On 5 February 2021, protestors marched in different parts of Oromia Regional State, including the city of Ambo, to demand the release of Oromo opposition politicians Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and Hamza Borana.⁵⁶ Police arrested and beat up several protesters. One student was killed.

Between 9 and 12 February 2021, Ethiopian youth protested in Mekelle town. The protest spread to Wukro Adigrat, Axum, Shire, and Abiyi-Adi in the following days leading to a halt of public transport.⁵⁷ Reports suggest an unknown number of people were injured or killed.

Kenya

⁵³ The East African, “Ethiopian lawyers ask Abiy to free jailed opponents before polls”, 28 December 2020, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/ethiopian-lawyers-ask-abiy-to-free-jailed-opponents-before-polls-3241024>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵⁴ Ethiopia observer, “Six out of ten charges brought against Jawar et al dropped”, 24 January 2021, <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2021/01/24/six-out-of-ten-charges-brought-against-jawar-et-al-dropped/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵⁵ Addis Standard, “News: elders’ intervention ends hunger strike by Oromo opposition politicians”, 8 March 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-elders-intervention-ends-hunger-strike-by-oromo-opposition-politicians/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵⁶ Addis Standard, “News: as Jawar et.al continue hunger strike Oromia region sees multiple protests demanding their release, justice for slain artist hachalu”, 8 February 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-as-jawar-et-al-continue-hunger-strike-oromia-region-sees-multiple-protests-demanding-their-release-justice-for-slain-artist-hachalu/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵⁷ ReliefWeb, “Ethiopia - Access Snapshot - Tigray region”, 28 February 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-access-snapshot-tigray-region-28-february-2021>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

General situation

On 1 February 2021, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions withdrew a case against 15 police officers and 6 county enforcement officers accused of violating people's rights while implementing COVID-19 measures. The Police Reforms Working Group voiced concern considering the rise in police brutality in 2020,⁵⁸

On 5 February 2021, one child was reported dead during the forceful evictions of 3,500 residents in Kibos, Kisumu county.⁵⁹ The police used tear gas to remove the residents, while the bulldozers brought down their homes. The child was stuck under the debris and died.

The Kenyan government announced its intention to close Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps due to threats by terrorist groups. The government gave the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) two weeks to come up with a plan for the closure.⁶⁰ On 24 March 2021, The Interior Cabinet Secretary, Fred Matiang'i declared there was "no room for negotiation." UNHCR expressed concern over the safety of the refugees and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Freedom of opinion and expression

On 3 November 2020, a Nation Media Group correspondent, Stephen Odour, was arrested following the publication of a story about the resurgence of the outlawed group⁶¹ Mombasa Republican Council (MRC). Odour was released following intervention from his regional boss.⁶²

On 9 November 2020, a former Nation Media group editor died in a hit and run accident in Nairobi,⁶³ becoming the fourth journalist from the media outlet to die in similar circumstances this year – an unusually high number. An investigation was launched; its outcome remains unknown.

⁵⁸ Twitter, "@ICJKenya", 2 February 2021, <https://twitter.com/ICJKenya/status/1356524543142207489>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁵⁹ Amnesty Kenya, "KENYA: FORCED EVICTION KILLS CHILD, 3,500 HOMELESS: RESIDENTS OF THE KIBOS SETTLEMENT", 11 February 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr32/3683/2021/en/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

⁶⁰ "Kenya orders closure of Dadaab, Kakuma refugee camps" 24 March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/kenya-orders-closure-of-dadaab-kakuma-refugee-camps>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶¹ Kenyans.co.ke, "Nation Journalist Arrested Over National Security Story", 3 November 2020, <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/58819-nation-journalist-arrested-over-national-security-story>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶² All Africa, "Kenya: Nmg Journalist Held in Tana River Over Mrc Story", 3 November 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202011031039.html>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶³ Kenyans.co.ke, "Ex-Nation Journalist Dies in Hit & Run Accident", 10 November 2020, <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/59010-ex-nation-journalist-dies-hit-run-accident>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

Two female journalists, Viola Kosome and Ondari Ogega, were sexually assaulted by the bodyguard of the Education Cabinet Secretary while covering the tour of a primary school.⁶⁴ The incident was caught on tape and caused public outrage. The Media Council of Kenya released a study finding that 73% of female journalists in Kenya are likely to experience sexual harassment while reporting.⁶⁵

On a different note, COVID-19 has caused financial strains for media outlets in Kenya. They have experienced challenges in maintaining business operations. RSF found that over 300 journalist positions have been lost in Kenya since the beginning of the pandemic.⁶⁶

Prior to the reopening of schools, the Kenyan government banned journalists from visiting school premises.⁶⁷ The announcement, which was made on 6 January 2021, prompted protest among the media and parents, who were concerned that it would allow schools to conceal the degree to which they are observing COVID-19 regulations.

On 1 February 2021, Mike Sonko, the former Nairobi Governor was charged with assault and robbery concerning alleged offences committed in 2019.⁶⁸ Sonko's lawyer claims that his arrest is related to statements he recently made at a rally about President Uhuru Kenyatta.⁶⁹

Bloggers, comedians, and activists are increasingly targeted for posting online contents. On 1 February 2021, the police arrested a blogger for allegedly posted "fake news" on his social media channel.⁷⁰ The blogger's post concerned the murder of a local high school student and was shared widely. On 4 March 2021, blogger Edgar Obare was arrested and charged with

⁶⁴ All Africa, "Kenya: Shock As Magoha's Bodyguard Sexually Harasses Journalists", 19 November 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202011200195.html>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶⁵ Citizen news, "73pc of female journalists likely to experience sexual harassment: MCK study", 3 November 2020, <https://citizentv.co.ke/news/73pc-of-female-journalists-likely-to-experience-sexual-harassment-mck-study-349882/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶⁶ Reliefweb, "The 2020 pandemic has challenged press freedom in Africa", 27, November 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/2020-pandemic-has-challenged-press-freedom-africa>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶⁷ Standard media, "State bans journalists from schools, sparking protests", 6 January 2021, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/adblock?u=https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/education/article/2001399252/state-bans-journalists-from-schools-sparking-protests>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶⁸ Standard Media, "Ex-Governor Mike Sonko arraigned after spending night in police stands", 2 February 2021, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/nairobi/article/2001402094/mike-sonkos-day-in-court>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁶⁹ All Africa, "Kenya: Sonko Charged with Assault and Robbery With Violence", 2 February 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202102030039.html>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷⁰ All Africa, "Kenya: Police Arrest 'Fake News' Suspect", 1 February 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202102020155.html>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

publishing false information under Section 23 of Computer Misuse and Cybercrime 2018.⁷¹ Obare posted a story relating to a Governor allegedly impregnating a young woman and failing to acknowledge paternity of the baby. Additionally, he was accused of coaching a lady to extort 10 million Kenyan shillings from a Governor.

On 11 March 2021, a Kenyan comedian was arrested by authorities and charged for violating the Kenya Films and Stage Play Act CAP 222. The comedian was filming a reality show when he was arrested. The Kenya Film Board alleged that the content of the show was “explicit.” He was shortly released after the arrest.

On 6 April 2021, activist Edwin Kaima was arrested on cybercrime charges for posting a public notice asking the world to stop lending Kenya money due to the high levels of corruption.⁷² The notice alleged that the money loaned to Kenya directly funds President Uhuru and his Deputy President William Ruto.

Freedom of association

Attacks on the LGBTI+ community during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased and reached alarming levels.⁷³ The Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) reported up to ten attacks per month on members of the community.

Similarly, attacks faced by the LGBTQI+ community in Kakuma refugee camp have also risen. On 5 March 2021,⁷⁴ The community requested resettlement to a safer area. Since the start of the year, members of the community were attacked at least five times.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 10 November 2020, two protesters were shot and many more sustained injuries during a two-day demonstration in Mai Mahiu town.⁷⁵ Local sand harvesters were protesting the recent doubling of sand harvesting fees. Police are investigating the two deaths.

Several protests were held in Kenya against the controversial re-election of Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni. On 13 January 2021, a rights group, HAKI Africa, demonstrated outside

⁷¹ The star, “Blogger Edgar Obare arrested for trying to extort Sh10 million from governor”, 4 March 2021, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2021-03-04-blogger-edgar-obare-arrested-for-trying-to-extort-sh10-million-from-governor/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷² Twitter, @BonifaceMwangi, 7 April 2021, <https://twitter.com/bonifacemwangi/status/1379672256138379266>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

⁷³ Voice of America, “Kenya's LGBTQ Community Faces Increased Abuse During Pandemic”, 24 November 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/kenyas-lgbtq-community-faces-increased-abuse-during-pandemic>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷⁴ Thomson Reuters Foundation “LGBT+ refugees call on U.N. for safe space after Kenya camp attacks”, 5 March 2021, <https://news.trust.org/item/20210305143008-5tyoq>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷⁵ KBC 1, “Two killed in Mai Mahiu protests”, 10 November 2020, <https://www.kbc.co.ke/two-killed-in-mai-mahiu-protests/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

the Ugandan embassy in Nairobi.⁷⁶ Four activists, including the head of HAKI Africa, were arrested and some sustained injuries after police officers used batons to beat them. On 22 January 2021, a protest was held in Nairobi's Jeevanjee Gardens, demanding the resignation of Ugandan President Museveni.⁷⁷ The police stopped the protest and confiscated placards on the basis that officials were not notified of the demonstration; however, this was later proven to be incorrect.

On 4 March 2021, Taveta residents and members of Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) demonstrated against the lack of personal protective equipment for doctors and poor health services in the country.⁷⁸ Authorities used tear gas against the protestors and arrested seven people, claiming they had not notified the authorities about the protest.

Rwanda

General Situation

On 11 November 2020, Rwanda Biometrical Center released a report that found that stigma of and discrimination against persons living with HIV had declined by 80%, compared to previous years.⁷⁹ The survey was conducted in an effort to inform policies on persons living with HIV and reducing stigma in general.

Former hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina sued the Greek charter company who operated the flight that took him to Rwanda for being complicit with the "kidnapping operations."⁸⁰ Rusesabagina, who after the 1994 genocide became a political opponent, was returned to Rwanda in August 2020, allegedly by force, and remains in detention on national security charges.

On 25 January 2021, Rwanda's human rights record was considered during the country's third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council, in Geneva.⁸¹ A number

⁷⁶ Anadolu Agency, "Kenya arrests top rights activists over Uganda protest", 13 January 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/kenya-arrests-top-rights-activists-over-uganda-protest/2108657>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷⁷ Daily Monitor, "Kenyan police disperse attempted protest against Museveni's re-election", 22 January 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/kenyan-police-disperse-attempted-protest-against-museveni-s-re-election-3265470>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷⁸ Youtube, Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), 4 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3YmLjmNqic>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁷⁹ CGTN Africa, "HIV/AIDS stigma drops by 80 pct in Rwanda: survey", 11 November 2020, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/11/11/hiv-aids-stigma-drops-by-80-pct-in-rwanda-survey/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁰ BBC, "Hotel Rwanda 'hero' sues Greek airline for 'aiding kidnap'", 17 December 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-5534678>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, "UN: Countries Call Out Rwanda's Rights Record" 1 February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/01/un-countries-call-out-rwandas-rights-record>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

of countries urged Rwanda to reform restrictive media laws and open up the civic space, to allow journalists and activists to work freely. DefendDefenders and CIVICUS, among other CSOs, submitted parallel reports⁸² focusing on the restrictive civic space.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Since the BBC published an article entitled “The Loyalty Oath Keeping Rwandans Abroad in Check,”⁸³ which is critical of President Kagame’s rule, friction has arisen between the news outlet and the government of Rwanda and its supporters. On 18 November 2020, Rwandan news outlets published several pieces accusing the BBC of sensationalism and spreading false and misleading allegations.⁸⁴

Concerns have continued to rise over the government’s crackdown on YouTubers and bloggers in Rwanda. On 18 December 2020, the Rwandan Media Commission (RMC) declared plans to register YouTube channels that operate as media outlets, officially to increase accountability.⁸⁵ However, they reconsidered the plan following several complaints from bloggers.

On 15 February 2021, Rwandan police arrested activist Yvonne Idamange Iryamukwiza.⁸⁶ The arrest is allegedly linked to a YouTube post that went viral, in which she denounced widespread human rights violations by the government. Yvonne was charged with inciting public disorder, resisting lawful arrest, and aggravated assault against a law enforcement officer. It is reported that the Rwandan national police used excessive force during the arrest.

Ahead of the Commonwealth Summit, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report that examined Rwanda’s repression of the right to freedom of expression. The report found that in the last year, at least eight people were threatened, arrested, or prosecuted for commenting on

⁸² DefendDefenders, “*Rwanda: UN rights review should shed light on civic space restrictions*”, 22 January 2021, <https://defenddefenders.org/rwanda-un-rights-review-should-shed-light-on-civic-space-restrictions/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸³ BBC, “*The loyalty oath keeping Rwandans abroad in check, 18 November 2020*”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54801979#:~:text=Leaked%20footage%20of%20a%20controversial,North%20Korea%22%20by%20its%20critics.>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁴ KT Press “*BBC Rwanda Coverage, Preference For Sensationalism Over The Truth?*”, 29 November 2020, <https://www.ktpress.rw/2020/11/bbc-rwanda-coverage-preference-for-sensationalism-over-the-truth/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁵ Journal du Cameroun, “*Rwanda introduces regulatory framework for youtube channels*” 18 December 2020, <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/rwanda-introduces-regulatory-framework-for-youtube-channels/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁶ Citi Newsroom, “*Rwandan YouTuber arraigned in court*”, 5 March 2021, <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/03/rwandan-youtuber-arraigned-in-court/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

current affairs on YouTube.⁸⁷ On 7 February 2021, Innocent Bahati, a poet, went missing two days after posting a poem focusing on social issues on his YouTube.⁸⁸

Freedom of association

On 17 February 2021, the trial of the former manager of Kigali's Hôtel des Mille Collines, Paul Rusesabagina, began. He is facing 25 years in prison. The case has drawn international attention and his family fears the outspoken government critic will not get a fair trial.⁸⁹ A recorded video call aired on Al-Jazeera showed Rwanda's Justice Minister, Johnston Busingye, admitting the government's role in the enforced disappearance.⁹⁰

On 22 February 2021, Seif Bamporiki, a leading opposition politician, was killed by an unidentified gunman in South Africa, where he had been living in exile. South African police believe he was shot in a robbery.⁹¹ However, Bamporiki's party, the Rwanda National Congress (RNC), claimed the case was unclear because the murder resembles previous assassinations of Rwandan political opponents abroad.⁹²

Somalia/Somaliland

General situation

Somalia is currently in a political impasse as a national election, which was set to take place on 8 February 2021, did not go ahead. With no date set for the election, the country remains in a period of uncertainty. Rising tensions threaten to further destabilise the country. Officials of Federal Member States of Jubaland and the semi-autonomous region of Puntland disagreed on

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch, "*Rwanda: Arrests, Prosecutions over YouTube Posts*", 30 March 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/30/rwanda-arrests-prosecutions-over-youtube-posts>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch, "*Rwanda: Arrests, Prosecutions over YouTube Posts*", 30 March 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/30/rwanda-arrests-prosecutions-over-youtube-posts>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch, "*Rwandan Judiciary Under Scrutiny*", 2 March 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/02/rwandan-judiciary-under-scrutiny>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹⁰ AlJazeera, "Rwanda paid for flight that led to Paul Rusesabagina arrest", 17 February 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/upfront/2021/2/26/rwanda-paid-for-flight-that-led-to-paul-rusesabagina-arrest>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹¹ BBC, "Rwandan Seif Bamporiki killed in South Africa", 22 February 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56119088?xtor=AL-72-%5Bpartner%5D-%5Byahoo.north.america%5D-%5Bheadline%5D-%5Bnews%5D-%5Bbizdev%5D-%5Bisapi%5D>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹² New York Times, "Rwanda Opposition Figure Is Killed in South Africa", 22 February 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/22/world/africa/rwanda-seif-bamporiki-killing.html>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

the new electoral model, which provides for an increase in the number of delegates who will elect MPs in the lower house, to 101.⁹³

The incumbent President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmaajo,” was accused of deliberately sabotaging the electoral process by failing to break the deadlock.⁹⁴ The opposition claimed they would no longer recognise his authority following the end of his tenure and called on him to step down.⁹⁵ On 3 April 2021, political leaders met in an attempt to break the deadlock but failed to agree on a plan.⁹⁶

As political factions failed to agree on the election process, President Farmaajo’s term ended with no clear path toward national elections. On 12 April 2021, the lower house of Somalia’s Parliament, the House of the People, voted to extend the Federal Government’s mandate for two years. The resolution gave the National Independent Electoral Commission two years to organise elections and allowed government branches, including President Farmaajo, to continue functioning during the two-year period. Political actors rejected the move as null and void, leaders of Puntland and Jubaland left Mogadishu as talks with the Federal Government collapsed,⁹⁷ and Somalia’s international partners, including the European Union and the U.S. have warned about possible sanctions and reevaluation of their relations with Somalia.⁹⁸

Just days before he left office, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Somalia by 15 January 2021.⁹⁹ However, concerns are growing that the

⁹³ Reuters, “Somalia’s opposition cease recognising president as election row escalates”, 8 February 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-election-idUSKBN2A80OD>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹⁴ The African Report, “Somalia’s delayed presidential elections: Top 7 issues to follow”, 4 February 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/62733/somalias-delayed-presidential-elections-top-7-issues-to-follow/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹⁵ Anadolu Agency, Somalia:Opposition vows more anti-government protest, 20 February 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-opposition-vows-more-anti-government-protests/2151796>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹⁶ The Guardian, “Inside Somalia’s impasse:election talks collapse amid mistrust and blame” 8 April 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/08/inside-somalias-impasse-election-talks-collapse-amid-mistrust-and-blame>, Accessed 9 April 2021.

⁹⁷ See Harun Maruf, <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1381966215053070342>, Accessed 14 April 2021.

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Somalia: The United States Opposes Federal Government Term Extensions,” 13 April 2021, <https://www.state.gov/somalia-the-united-states-opposes-federal-government-term-extensions/>; European Union, “Somalia: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the current political situation,” 13 April 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/96545/Somalia%20:%20Statement%20by%20the%20High%20Representative%20Josep%20Borrell%20on%20the%20current%20political%20situation, Accessed 14 April 2021.

⁹⁹ BBC, “Somali concern at US troop withdrawal” 18 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55677077>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

withdrawal, if fully implemented, could have an adverse impact on counter-terrorism efforts in Somalia. On the other hand, civilian casualties resulting from U.S. air strikes in Somalia have never been properly addressed, and the families have never received reparations.

Somaliland, which declared its independence but remains unrecognised as a state by the international community, is set to hold parliamentary and local council elections on 31 May 2021. Observers have witnessed large numbers of men and women registering to vote for the first time.¹⁰⁰ On 3 September 2020, three political parties that are standing for election signed a commitment to ensure diversity in Parliament; they plan to nominate 18 women and three candidates from minority clans for the parliamentary election.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Freedom of expression continues to be under intense pressure in Somalia. Journalists have faced an increase in targeted attacks, harassment, and intimidation. Journalists have reported being targeted by both the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), as well as by terrorist group Al-Shabaab.

On 27 December 2020, Kilwe Adan Farah, a journalist based in Puntland, was arrested and detained by the Puntland Intelligence and Security Agency (PISA) following the coverage of an anti-inflation protest in Garowe town.¹⁰¹ Kilwe was held in an undisclosed location with no access to his family or lawyer. On 11 January 2021, he was transferred to Garowe prison and charged with attempted murder by the Puntland military. Kilwe was sentenced to three months in jail despite the prosecution not providing sufficient evidence for the charge.¹⁰²

Kilwe was subsequently presented before a military court. He was accused of five new charges of delinquency, circulating false news, disturbing public order, offence against the authorities through damaging posters, and bringing the nation or the state into contempt.¹⁰³ On 17 March 2021, he was sentenced to three years in jail by the Puntland military court, in the absence of

¹⁰⁰ Gov. UK, “Joint statement on announcement of date for Somaliland’s parliamentary and local council elections”, 9 February 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-announcement-of-date-for-somalilands-parliamentary-and-local-council-elections>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Journalist Kilwe Adan Farah detained, accused of murder in Somali state of Puntland”, 20 January 2021. <https://cpj.org/2021/01/journalist-kilwe-adan-farah-detained-accused-of-murder-in-somali-state-of-puntland/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰² Horn Observers, “SOMALIA: SJS, Barrister Michael Polak of Church Court Chambers and Justice Abroad call for Puntland authorities to drop charges and free journalist Kilwe”, 2 February 2021, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/692/SOMALIA-SJS-Barrister-Michael-Polak-of-Church-Court-Chambers-and-Justice-Abroad-call-for-Puntland-authorities-to-drop-charges-and-free-journalist-Kilwe>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰³ Horn observers, “Freelance journalist Kilwe appears before Puntland Military Court, SJS calls for his freedom”, 27 February 2021, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/722/Freelance-journalist-Kilwe-appears-before-Puntland-Military-Court-SJS-calls-for-his-freedom>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

his lawyer.¹⁰⁴ Kilwe was later set free following a presidential pardon on 22 March 2021, after spending 84 days in jail.¹⁰⁵

On 8 February 2021, NISA officials raided Somali Cable TV offices, damaging equipment, pointing guns at employees, and arbitrarily arresting two journalists.¹⁰⁶ The journalists were taken to Godka Jilacow prison for interrogation and later released without charges.

On 1 March 2021, independent journalist Jamal Farah Adan was shot dead by two unidentified gunmen outside his shop in Galkayo, central Somalia region of Mudug.¹⁰⁷ Al-Shabaab took responsibility for the assassination citing his opposition to the group as the reason. Jamal criticised both the Federal Government and Al-Shabaab in his work. According to the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), the journalist had been threatened prior to the incident and reported it to the police.¹⁰⁸

On 20 March 2021, Sharma'arke Abdinur Wehliye, a Goobjoob Media group cameraman, was shot by a police officer.¹⁰⁹ Wehliye sustained serious injuries from the bullet penetrating through his stomach and fracturing his arm. The reasons for his shooting are unknown. According to SJS, the police have not yet conducted an investigation.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 26 December 2020, protests broke out in Garowe, Puntland concerning the high inflation rate.¹¹⁰ Reportedly, businesses refused to accept the Somali currency and are instead opting for

¹⁰⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, "Somali military court sentences journalist Kilwe Adan Farah to 3 years in prison", 18 March 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/03/somali-military-court-sentences-journalist-kilwe-adan-farah-to-3-years-in-prison/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Anadolu Agency, "Somalia: Puntland leader pardons journalist", 22 March 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-puntland-leader-pardons-journalist/2184328>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Key Media, "NISA agents raid TV office, arrest journalists", 8 February 2021, <https://www.keydmedia.net/en/news/nisa-agents-raid-tv-office-arrest-journalists>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists, Somali journalist Jamal Farah Adan shot and killed, Al-Shabaab claims responsibility, 4 March 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/03/somali-journalist-jamal-farah-adan-shot-and-killed-al-shabaab-claims-responsibility/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Somali Journalists Syndicate, "Independent journalist shot dead in Galkayo", 1 March 2021, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2021/03/01/independent-journalist-shot-dead-in-galkayo/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Somali Journalists Syndicate, "SJS condemns police gun shooting that caused injury of Goobjoog cameraman in Mogadishu, calls for investigation" 20 March 2021, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2021/03/21/sjs-condemns-police-gun-shooting-that-caused-injury-of-goobjoog-cameraman-in-mogadishu-calls-for-investigation/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹¹⁰ Puntland Post, "Anti-inflation protests bring businesses in garowe to a standstill", 26 December 2020, <https://puntlandpost.net/2020/12/26/anti-inflation-protests-bring-businesses-in-garowe-to-a-standstill/>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

US dollars. The impact of inflation and currency depreciation is affecting both businesses and citizens.

On 19 February 2021, security forces fired gunshots at protestors demonstrating against delays of the country's elections.¹¹¹ Reports suggest that at least four people, including soldiers, were killed, and three were wounded in the clashes between military personnel and protestors. Four days later, the Somali government banned protests in Mogadishu due to rising COVID-19 cases and security threats. The decision came after the opposition called for another anti-government rally.¹¹²

South Sudan

General Situation

South Sudan continues to face instability as parts of the country are experiencing active conflict. In addition, intercommunal tensions have been rising in several parts of the country, leading to local-level violence that threaten to spiral out of control and destabilise the country. In its last report, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan indicated that “staggering levels of violence” continue in South Sudan.¹¹³ Several people were injured and seven killed during an intercommunal fight in Tonj North Country of Warrap State in December 2020.¹¹⁴ The unrest broke out between heavily armed youths that were in opposing groups. 11 people were killed in December 2020 from the conflict in Tonj county, making it a particularly unstable area in South Sudan. In January 2021, South Sudanese civil society activists and religious leaders held peace talks between communities.¹¹⁵ They encouraged the community to consider the ongoing peace dialogue in Rome and resolve their differences.

¹¹¹ AP News, “Somali security forces fire on protest over delayed election”, 19 February 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/mohamed-abdullahi-mohamed-national-elections-elections-africa-somalia-fd063e7b52ef62f63ebe0ef1039547d9>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹¹² Anadolu Agency, “Somalia bans opposition protests in Mogadishu”, 23 February 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-bans-opposition-protests-in-mogadishu/2154562>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

¹¹³ OHCHR, “Despite renewed political commitment, staggering levels of violence continued across South Sudan for the second successive year, UN experts note,” 19 February 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26761&LangID=E>, Accessed 14 April 2021.

¹¹⁴ Voice of America, “Inter-Communal Clashes Kill 7 in South Sudan”, 17 December 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudan-focus/inter-communal-clashes-kill-7-south-sudan>, Accessed 5 April 2021.

¹¹⁵ Voice of America, “South Sudan Religious Leaders Hold Talks Aimed at Ending Intercommunal Fighting”, 6 January 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudan-focus/south-sudan-religious-leaders-hold-talks-aimed-ending-intercommunal>, Accessed 5 April 2021.

Despite the delays in fully implementing the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement and the political uncertainty, South Sudan is scheduled to have a presidential election in 2021¹¹⁶. In November 2020, a UN report alleged that President Salva Kiir locked out the opposition from the decision-making process.¹¹⁷

Concerns arise following an announcement that the government would no longer intervene in intercommunal fighting. On 29 January 2021, President Salva Kiir stated security forces would not be deployed when intercommunal fighting breaks out in Jonglei State and Pibor Administrative Area.¹¹⁸ Civil society actors noted that it was the government's responsibility to provide resolution to conflicts and protect civilians.

On 29 January 2021, South Sudan's cabinet approved the process of establishing a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, a Hybrid Court for South Sudan, and a Compensation and Reparation Authority, as planned out in the 2018 revitalized peace deal (R-ARCSS).¹¹⁹ The African Union welcomed the development as a positive step towards restoring peace and stability. The Council of Ministers has authorised the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs to move ahead with the establishment of the three transitional justice mechanisms, but the key issue remains as to whether this plan will be implemented in practice.

On 5 February 2021, a group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) led by DefendDefenders wrote a letter to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC),¹²⁰ urging states to support to the extension of the mandate of the CHRSS, ahead of the Council's 46th session (22 February-24 March 2021). On 23 March 2021, the UN extended the mandate of the CHRSS¹²¹; however, a second resolution was adopted at the initiative of the African Group of states on behalf of South Sudan. The resolution attempted to discontinue the CHRSS's mandate and to replace it with technical assistance to be provided by OHCHR.

¹¹⁶ ReliefWeb, "Elections and instability as Africa enters 2021", 12 January 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/elections-and-instability-africa-enters-2021>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹¹⁷ United Nations, "Interim report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan submitted pursuant to resolution 2521", 25 November 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_1141.pdf, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹¹⁸ Voice Of America, "South Sudan's Kiir to Stay Out of Inter-communal Conflicts", 29 January 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudans-kiir-stay-out-inter-communal-conflicts>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹¹⁹ Jurist, "South Sudan to begin establishing hybrid court, institutions for transitional justice" 2 February 2021, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2021/02/south-sudan-to-begin-establishing-hybrid-court-institutions-for-transitional-justice/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹²⁰ DefendDefenders, "Human Rights Council: Extend the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan", 5 February 2021, <https://defenddefenders.org/human-rights-council-extend-the-mandate-of-the-commission-on-human-rights-in-south-sudan/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹²¹ DefendDefenders, "South Sudan: the UN assumes its responsibility to maintain a focus on human rights violations", 24 March 2021, <https://defenddefenders.org/south-sudan-the-un-assumes-its-responsibility-to-maintain-a-focus-on-human-rights-violations/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

Freedom of opinion and expression

On 2 November 2020, One Free Press Coalition selected the case of Dalia Marko as one of the most urgent, unsolved cases regarding journalists.¹²² Marko was killed when unidentified gunmen ambushed an official convoy in South Sudan in 2015.

According to a report released in December 2020, South Sudan's National Security Service (NSS) tortured and killed journalists at a detention centre.¹²³ The report details the testimonies of journalists who were arrested and detained after writing articles about opposition parties.

A group of five people, including a Russian activist, Pyotr Verzilov, and a blogger, Ilya Varlamov, were detained in South Sudan. The group was detained on 13 January 2021,¹²⁴ upon arrival at Kapoeta city airport, where they had reportedly arrived as tourists and planned to take a connecting flight to Juba. The airport security found a drone remote control in their luggage, which authorities were concerned that they might have used to photograph military equipment. The group was released on 14 January with no charges.

A report Amnesty International released in February 2021 found that South Sudan's National Security Service (NSS) is using abusive surveillance to target journalists, activists, and opposition.¹²⁵ The two-year investigation found that the surveillance, including infiltration and phone tapping, is leading to a climate of fear and self-censorship. These findings are in line with findings by DefendDefenders, presented in a report published in May 2020.¹²⁶ Similarly, on 18 March 2021, Front Line Defenders released a report that found that the NSS targets and harasses HRDs, journalists, and political opposition members living outside of South Sudan.¹²⁷

¹²² One Free Press Coalition, "These 10 journalists have been killed and deserve justice immediately", 3 November 2020, <https://fortune.com/2020/11/02/most-urgent-cases-journalists-killed-ranked-november-2020/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch, "Witness: Silencing Dissent in South Sudan", 14 December 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/14/witness-silencing-dissent-south-sudan>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹²⁴ Tass Russian News Agency, "Four more Russians arrested in South Sudan, blogger says" 13 January 2021, <https://tass.com/emergencies/1244321>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹²⁵ Amnesty International, "South Sudan: Rampant abusive surveillance by NSS instils climate of fear" 2 February 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/south-sudan-abusive-surveillance-by-national-security-service-climate-of-fear/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹²⁶ DefendDefenders, "Targeted but Not Deterred: Human rights defenders fighting for justice and peace in South Sudan," 19 May 2020, <https://defenddefenders.org/targeted-but-not-deterred-human-rights-defenders-fighting-for-justice-and-peace-in-south-sudan/>, Accessed 14 April 2021.

¹²⁷ Front Line Defenders, "No Refuge: South Sudan's Targeting of Refugee HRDs Outside the Country", 18 March 2021, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/report-no-refuge-south-sudans-targeting-refugee-hrds-outside-country>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Activists, civilians, and motorcyclists, known as “boda boda” riders, held demonstrations in Juba following the death of South Sudanese singer Trisha Cee and a boda boda rider in a road accident.¹²⁸ The protestors demanded better health services to avoid similar occurrences in future. South Sudanese police arrested and later released a few protestors and activists.

Sudan

General situation

Sudan continues to take progressive steps to open up the civic and democratic space, and to improve respect for women’s and girls’ rights. On 24 February 2021, Sudan announced that it would approve the ratification to the Conventions against Torture (UNCAT) and on Enforced Disappearance (CED).¹²⁹

On 30 December 2020, United Nations-African Union mission in the Darfur (UNAMID) ceased its operations in Sudan.¹³⁰ The drawdown will be effective as of 30 June 2020. The humanitarian situation remains serious as violence against civilians and intercommunal violence have been increasing, especially in West Darfur.

On 18 February 2021, Sudan signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the Ali Al-Kushayb's trial.¹³¹ Kushayb was accused of persecution, murder and rape in the western Sudanese region of Darfur in 2003-2004.

Freedom of opinion and expression

On 27 January 2021, the Sudanese Journalist Network (SJN) criticised the military restriction of journalists entering Darfur, under the pretext of a deteriorating security situation.¹³² On 11

¹²⁸ South Sudan Friendship Press, “Mobil roundabout protestors released without charge” 30 March 2021, <https://www.s-sfp.com/post/mobil-roundabout-protestors-released-without-charge>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹²⁹ Radio Dabanga, “‘Historic step’ as Sudan ratifies conventions on torture, disappearance”, 24 February, 2021, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/historic-step-as-sudan-ratifies-conventions-on-torture-disappearance>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³⁰ UN News, “UN confirms closure of Darfur peacekeeping mission” 30 December 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1081122#:~:text=The%20joint%20United%20Nations%2DAfrican.of%20civilians%20in%20the%20area.>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³¹ Jurist,” Sudan signs ICC cooperation agreement for Darfur trial”, 18 February 2021, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2021/02/sudan-signs-icc-cooperation-agreement-for-darfur-trial/>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³² Radio Dabanga, “Military intelligence bars journalists from Darfur”, 27 January 2021, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/military-intelligence-bars-journalists-from-darfur>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

February 2021, Orwa Alsadig, a Sudanese politician and political activist, was sued¹³³ by the Sovereign Council for publishing lies, fake news, and insults after a speech he made was widely shared on social media.¹³⁴

On 8 November 2020, Waad Bahjat, a woman human rights defender (WHRD), was charged with defamation, insult to a public servant exercising judicial proceeding (Article 116 of the Sudanese Criminal Act of 1991), publishing false news (Article 66), and public annoyance (Article 77).¹³⁵ Bahjat was charged for posting a live video on Facebook recording an incident where several women were harassed by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and denied access to fuel at a petrol station.

Freedom of association

The Sudanese government made amendments to the Voluntary and Humanitarian Works Act (2006). On 10 March, the Minister of Social Development, Ahmed Adam Bakhiet suspended a controversial set of regulations that set out to govern organisations registered under the Sudan Voluntary and Humanitarian Works Act (SVHWA) of 2006. The February regulations were approved by the previous minister Lena Al-Shiekh, during her last days in office.¹³⁶ The suspended regulations provided for the criminalisation of any person or group of persons who exercised any voluntary work in the name of an organisation without having been registered. They introduced a right of the registrar to refuse a registration application as per Article 13 of the SVHWA.¹³⁷

Tanzania

General situation

On 5 November 2020, former President John Pombe Magufuli was sworn in for his second five-year term.¹³⁸ Magufuli claimed a landslide victory of 84% of the votes in the general

¹³³ Global voices, “Sudan's revised cybercrime law falls short on its promise, 4 March 2021, <https://globalvoices.org/2021/03/04/sudans-revised-cybercrime-law-falls-short-on-its-promise/>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³⁴ Omer Alniel, Twitter, 6 February 2021, <https://twitter.com/OmerAlniel/status/1358154259972382720>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³⁵ Africa Centre for justice and peace studies, “A female human rights defender faces one year imprisonment for Facebook video” 13 January 2021, <https://www.acjps.org/a-female-human-rights-defender-faces-one-year-imprisonment-for-facebook-video/>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³⁶ “Minister suspends controversial HAC 2021 regulations”, Sudan Civic Space Monitor, Sudan, 10 March 2021, <https://sudan.civicmonitor.org/minister-suspends-controversial-hac-2021-regulations/>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³⁷ “HAC new regulations stifle civic space - part 1 of 5”, Sudan civic space Monitor, Sudan, 7 March 2021, <https://sudan.civicmonitor.org/hac-new-regulations-stifle-civic-space-part-1-5/>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

¹³⁸ The African Report, “Tanzania: ‘Dark days ahead’ says opposition as Magufuli sworn in for second term”, 5 November, 2020, <https://www.theafricareport.com/49290/tanzania-dark-days-ahead-says-opposition-as-magufuli-sworn-in-for-second-term/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

elections held on 28 October 2020.¹³⁹ National and international observers questioned the electoral process, noting the uneven playing field between the opposition parties and the ruling party.¹⁴⁰ Opposition candidate Tundu Lissu rejected the results due to the weaponisation of the law against opposition parties, particularly the Chadema and ACT-Wazalendo parties.¹⁴¹ On 29 October 2020, the opposition candidate in Zanzibar was arrested with leaders of the ACT-Wazalendo party.¹⁴² During the election, military were deployed on the streets and at polling stations.¹⁴³

During the election, several election observers were denied entry into Tanzania and opposition parties were prevented from observing at some polling stations.¹⁴⁴ The Tanzanian authorities only allowed delegates from the East African Community, African Union, and South Africa to send monitors. On 5 January 2021, four civil rights organisations filed a suit against the Tanzanian government for “massive violations” in the recent general election.

¹³⁹ Voice of America, “Tanzania’s Magufuli Wins Landslide Re-election”, 1 November 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/tanzanias-magufuli-wins-landslide-re-election>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁴⁰ Council on Foreign Relations, “Magufuli is Transforming Tanzania's Ruling Party From a “Benign Hegemon” Into a Malevolent One”, 22 October 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/magufuli-transforming-tanzanias-ruling-party-benign-hegemon-malevolent-one>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁴¹ All African, “Tanzania: Tundu Lissu Rejects Election Results”, 29 October 2020, https://allafrica.com/stories/202010290560.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabmrjk, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁴² BBC, “Tanzanian opposition 'won't accept poll results'”, 29 October 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-africa-47639452?ns_mchannel=social&ns_source=twitter&ns_campaign=bbc_live&ns_linkname=5f9a941245324002c52d812c%26Tanzanian%20opposition%20%27won%27t%20accept%20poll%20results%27%262020-10-29T10%3A42%3A52%2B00%3A00&ns_fee=0&pinned_post_locator=urn:asset:a6be327d-4f04-42de-a442-cab92c390c4b&pinned_post_asset_id=5f9a941245324002c52d812c&pinned_post_type=share, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁴³ Aljazeera, “Fear of violence grows as Tanzania opposition denounces election” 29 October 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/29/fears-of-violence-grows-as-tanzania-opposition-denounces>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁴⁴ BBC, “Blocked observers urge transparency in Tanzania count”, 29 October 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-africa-47639452?ns_mchannel=social&ns_source=twitter&ns_campaign=bbc_live&ns_linkname=5f9aa88d49467302d61ce250%26Blocked%20observers%20urge%20transparency%20in%20Tanzania%20count%262020-10-29T11%3A48%3A38.436Z&ns_fee=0&pinned_post_locator=urn:asset:055e41c6-9028-4612-af7b-36bf6d1bb88f&pinned_post_asset_id=5f9aa88d49467302d61ce250&pinned_post_type=share, Accessed 6 April 2021.

Organisations from Kenya and Uganda sued Tanzania at the East African Court of Justice, alleging that security agents clobbered, detained, and even killed opposition supporters during the election campaigns as well as after the results were announced in October. On 20 January 2021, the US government imposed a visa restriction on Tanzanian officials for undermining a free and fair election¹⁴⁵.

On 17 March 2021, former President John Magufuli's passing was announced.¹⁴⁶ On 6 April 2021, President Samia Suhulu Hassan announced that Tanzania will start following scientific procedures in handling COVID-19.¹⁴⁷ She intends to form a special committee to advise the government on steps to take in the fight against coronavirus. Her swearing in also offers hope with regard to human rights. In early speeches, she indicated that she intended to uphold freedom of expression, including online, and due process. She ordered the Information Ministry to lift the ban on all media outlets that were suspended or punished. These positive moves mark a stark contrast to President Magufuli's rule, which was characterised by an assault on civic space and independent voices.¹⁴⁸

Freedom of association

The right to freedom of association remains restricted in Tanzania. Harassment of, attacks against, and arbitrary arrests of opposition leaders have been widely reported. During the election period, Tundu Lissu claimed that Chadema party members were stopped from reaching some polling stations and denied the right to vote.¹⁴⁹

On 10 November 2020, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet condemned the violence and continued harassment of opposition leaders and supporters following the election.¹⁵⁰ Opposition figures fled Tanzania following reports of harassment,

¹⁴⁵ The East Africa, "Trump imposes visa restrictions on Tanzanian officials over vote", 20 January 2021, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/trump-imposes-visa-restrictions-on-tanzanian-officials-3262614>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Voice of America, "Tanzanian President dies", 18 March 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/tanzanian-president-dies>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Voice of America, "Tanzania Orders Reopening of Media Houses Closed Under Magufuli", 6 April 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/tanzania-orders-reopening-media-houses-closed-under-magufuli>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁴⁸ DefendDefenders, "Spreading Fear, Asserting Control: Tanzania's assault on civic space," 26 June 2018, <https://defenddefenders.org/spreading-fear-asserting-control-tanzanias-assault-on-civic-space/>, Accessed 14 April 2021.

¹⁴⁹ BBC, "Tanzania opposition leader alleges election fraud", 28 October 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-africa-47639452?ns_mchannel=social&ns_source=twitter&ns_campaign=bbc_live&ns_linkname=5f997b6267645202b6c4c606%26Tanzania%20opposition%20leader%20alleges%20election%20fraud%262020-10-28T14%3A16%3A05.275Z&ns_fee=0&pinned_post_locator=urn:asset:d7b41da1-b09a-4cd1-8846-dc9e47152372&pinned_post_asset_id=5f997b6267645202b6c4c606&pinned_post_type=share, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵⁰ OHRC "UN rights chief disturbed by harassment of opposition following Tanzania elections", 10 November 2020,

intimidation, and threats. Tundu Lissu left for Belgium after spending a few days at the German Ambassador's residence¹⁵¹ and Godbless Lema sought asylum in Kenya.¹⁵²

On 17 November 2020, Nassor Mazrui, Deputy Secretary-General of ACT-Wazalendo was released after spending 23 days in detention. The party claims Mazrui was abducted from his home, beaten and denied access to his party members.¹⁵³ On 15 March 2021, four Tanzanian opposition politicians fled to Kenya due to fear of persecution for rejecting the 2020 election results¹⁵⁴. The four politicians are seeking asylum as a result of the threats faced in Tanzania.

On 20 January 2021, Paschal Raymond, an LGBTIQ+ rights defender was killed.¹⁵⁵ Raymond's body was found in a sewage drain with all his possessions and multiple stab wounds on his eyes. His colleagues claim his death is related to his well-known work of defending the rights of LGBTIQ+ people in Dar es Salaam. The police launched an investigation, holding two suspects for questioning.

The accounts of the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) remain frozen, despite THRDC challenging the authorities' decision and engaging in dialogue regarding the rights of civil society organisations and due process of law. THRDC saluted the announcements and promises made by President Hassan.¹⁵⁶

Freedom of opinion and expression

During the elections, the Tanzanian government issued a directive to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority to suspend bulk SMS and voice calls, in order to stop mass messaging or

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26489&LangID=E>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵¹ DW, "Opposition leader Tundu Lissu leaves Tanzania", 10 November 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/opposition-leader-tundu-lissu-leaves-tanzania/a-55559133>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵² Voice of America, "Amnesty International: Opposition Politicians Fleeing Tanzania", 9 November 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/amnesty-international-opposition-politicians-fleeing-tanzania>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch, "Tanzania: Repression Mars National Elections", 23 November 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/23/tanzania-repression-mars-national-elections>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵⁴ Tuko, "Escaping Persecution? Tanzanian Opposition Politicians Flee to Kenya over Safety Concerns", 17 March 2021, <https://www.tuko.co.ke/406027-escaping-persecution-tanzanian-opposition-politicians-flee-kenya-safety-concerns.html>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵⁵ ProtectDefenders, "Tanzania: Killing of human rights defender Paschal Raymond", 10 February 2021, <https://protectdefenders.eu/tanzania-killing-of-human-rights-defender-paschal-raymond/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵⁶ See <https://twitter.com/OlengurumwaO/status/1379535010512973831>, Accessed on 14 April 2021.

calling from 24 October to 11 November 2020.¹⁵⁷ There were reports that messages carrying the names of opposition leaders were not able to go through and were being systematically rejected by the national server.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, social media platforms including Twitter and WhatsApp were largely restricted throughout and after the elections.

On 3 January 2021, Zara Kay, an Australian activist, was detained in Tanzania after posting a satirical social media post criticising how the government was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵⁹ Her lawyer claims her belongings, including her passport, were confiscated during her interrogation and later lost. Kay was allegedly subjected to further questioning, and continued to face criminal charges after her release.

On 14 March 2021, Tanzanian police arrested one man for spreading ‘false news’ about former President Magufuli being sick and possibly contracting COVID-19.¹⁶⁰ The Minister of Legal and Constitutional Affairs held that Tanzanians were violating the Cybercrime Act 2015 by posting that the former president was ill. On 17 March 2021, President Hassan announced that Magufuli has died of a heart condition¹⁶¹.

On 6 April 2021, President Hassan ordered the Information Ministry to lift the ban on all previously suspended or sanctioned media outlets, including online broadcasters.¹⁶² President Hassan stated the media outlets should “follow the law” while reporting, and that due process would be upheld. However, concerns remain as a number of laws relating to freedom of opinion and expression are not in line with Tanzania’s constitutional and international obligations.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

¹⁵⁷ Twitter, “@TheObserver”, 26 October 2020, <https://twitter.com/observerug/status/1320606193413431297>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵⁸ The observer, “Tanzania gov’t blocks SMS, calls ahead of presidential polls”, 26 October 2020, <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/67110-tanzania-gov-t-blocks-sms-calls-ahead-of-presidential-polls>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁵⁹ The Sydney Morning Herald, “Australian woman arrested in Tanzania for satirical post”, 3 January 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australian-woman-arrested-in-tanzania-for-satirical-post-20210103-p56rgj.html>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶⁰ AP News, “Tanzania cops arrest man for reporting that president is ill”, 14 March 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/dar-es-salaam-health-tanzania-coronavirus-pandemic-arrests-5387517596c544323889b40c9bd608d2>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶¹ BBC, “John Magufuli: Tanzania's president dies aged 61 after Covid rumours”, 18 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56437852>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶² Voice of America, “Tanzania Orders Reopening of Media Houses Closed Under Magufuli”, 6 April 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/tanzania-orders-reopening-media-houses-closed-under-magufuli>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

On 27 October 2020, clashes broke out between police and opposition supporters.¹⁶³ Police used tear gas and beat the supporters who were gathered outside a polling station. Three people were reportedly killed and at least nine were injured.¹⁶⁴

On 2 November 2020, police arrested the chairman of Chadema party, Freeman Mbowe, and several other politicians as they met to plan to protest the election result.¹⁶⁵ The Chadema party leadership reported that Mbowe was being charged with non-bailable terrorism charges.¹⁶⁶ In the last few years, charging on non-bailable offences has been used to keep activists, opposition members, and journalists in detention. Police closed off areas where the demonstration was planned and banned the protests officially. Tundu Lissu was detained briefly and questioned,¹⁶⁷ reportedly in connection with the planned protest on the same day.

Uganda

General situation

Civic space in Uganda continues to be under threat, particularly in relation to elections. On 30 October 2020, Ugandan authorities banned a coalition of more than 60 organisations formed to monitor the elections, claiming that their activities were illegal.¹⁶⁸ This was followed by an announcement in November 2020 that the European Union would not be observing the general elections, for the first time in over 20 years.¹⁶⁹

The presidential and parliamentary elections were held across Uganda on 14 January 2021. On 16 January 2021, election officials announced that incumbent President Yoweri Museveni had

¹⁶³ Taarifa, “Election Shooting, Arrests & Detention In Zanzibar”, 29 October 2020, <https://taarifa.rw/election-shooting-arrests-detention-in-zanzibar/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Macau Business, “Zanzibar opposition leader held, 3 killed in poll clashes”, 27 October 2020, <https://www.macaubusiness.com/zanzibar-opposition-leader-held-3-killed-in-poll-clashes/>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶⁵ Aljazeera, “Tanzania opposition leaders held, post-election protests foiled”, 2 November 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/2/tanzania-police-arrest-opposition-party-leader-ahead-of-protests>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶⁶ Twitter, “@Tanzaniaupdates”, 2 November 2020, <https://twitter.com/TanzaniaUpdates/status/1323227225412481024>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶⁷ Aljazeera, “Tanzania: Lissu briefly detained amid wave of opposition arrests”, 2 November 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/2/tanzania-police-arrest-defeated-presidential-candidate-lissu>, Accessed 6 April 2021.

¹⁶⁸ PD online, “Uganda bans election monitoring group ahead of presidential polls”, 30 October 2020, <https://www.pd.co.ke/news/world/uganda-bans-election-monitoring-group-ahead-of-presidential-polls-57280/>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁶⁹ Twitter, “@NTVUganda”, 12 November 2020, <https://twitter.com/ntvuganda/status/1326770456272232450>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

won with 58.6% of the vote.¹⁷⁰ Opposition candidate Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as “Bobi Wine,” reportedly won 34.8% of the votes. The National Unity Party (NUP) party won 56 seats, including nine out of 11 for Kampala, making NUP the largest opposition party.¹⁷¹

OHCHR voiced concerns about the “deteriorating” human rights situation,¹⁷² echoing claims of election irregularities.¹⁷³ Shortly after the results were announced, Robert Kyagulanyi called the vote “the most fraudulent election in the history of Uganda.”¹⁷⁴ The African Union observers noted there were irregularities.¹⁷⁵ The day after the results were announced, NUP announced that the party would challenge the election results.¹⁷⁶

On 22 February 2021, Robert Kyagulanyi withdrew his petition contesting the results.¹⁷⁷ Bobi Wine claimed the Supreme Court prevented him from presenting evidence to support his case by rejecting 200 affidavits. He maintains the Supreme Court decision was biased.

On 15 March 2021, East Africa Law Society filed a suit against the government of Uganda for the nationwide internet shutdown during the January 2021 elections.¹⁷⁸ The society is mandated to promote human rights, rule of law, and good governance.

¹⁷⁰ Aljazeera, “Museveni declared winner of disputed Uganda presidential election”, 16 January 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/16/ugandas-museveni-declared-winner-of-presidential-election>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷¹ The Africa Report, “Uganda elections: Museveni wins, Bobi Wine the rising power in parliament”, 17 January 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/59593/uganda-elections-museveni-wins-bobi-wine-the-new-power-in-parliament/>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷² UN News, Uganda: ‘Deteriorating’ human rights situation in run-up to elections next week, 8 January 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1081662>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷³ Daily Monitor, “EC excludes results from over 1,200 polling stations” 18 January 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/ec-excludes-results-from-over-1-200-polling-stations-3260542>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷⁴ The Guardian, “Bobi Wine's party to challenge Museveni’s Ugandan election victory”, 17 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jan/17/bobi-wine-party-challenge-museveni-uganda-election-victory>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Daily Monitor, “Observers give mixed reactions on election”, 18 January 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/observers-give-mixed-reactions-on-election-3261042>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷⁶ The Guardian, “Bobi Wine's party to challenge Museveni’s Ugandan election victory”, 17 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jan/17/bobi-wine-party-challenge-museveni-uganda-election-victory>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Voice of America, “Uganda Opposition Leader Bobi Wine Accuses Court of Bias, Withdraws Election Petition”, 22 February 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/uganda-opposition-leader-bobi-wine-accuses-court-bias-withdraws-election-petition>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁷⁸ The East African, “EA Law Society sues Uganda for shutting down internet during polls”, 15 March 2021, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/ea-law-society-sues-uganda-internet-shutdown-election-3323246>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Since the political party presidential nominations and during recent unrest, journalists have been targeted. On 12 November 2020, a journalist working for Bukedde TV was arrested in relation to a Facebook post. A car carrying NBS TV crew covering the NUP campaign trail was vandalised on 12 November, and the NBS crew were attacked by protesters, who also stole some of their equipment.¹⁷⁹

In the period before the election, attacks on journalists and members of the press increased. Journalists were reportedly targeted when covering protests and violence. Journalist Ashraf Kasirye, was shot in the head with a teargas canister on 27 December 2020.¹⁸⁰ In the same incident, two journalists were hit by teargas canisters.¹⁸¹ On 13 January 2021, a journalist for Vision Group, Emmanuel Ojok, was arrested, detained, and beaten by army personnel while covering a raid at the home of an FDC party official.¹⁸² On 17 February 2021, four journalists and three lawmakers were beaten by the army police.¹⁸³ The journalists and MPs were waiting to be addressed by Bobi Wine after he presented a petition against his abducted supporters outside the OHCHR office in Kampala.

On 11 January 2021, Facebook announced that they had closed several accounts linked to Ugandan government officials and the leading NRM party, accusing them of engaging in inauthentic behaviour designed to target public debate ahead of the election.¹⁸⁴ On 12 January 2021, President Museveni addressed the move, accusing the social media company of “arrogance” and stating that the block of the site was “unfortunate but unavoidable.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Chimp Report, “UJA condemns brutal attacks on journalists”, 20 November 2020, <https://chimpreports.com/uja-condemns-brutal-attacks-on-journalists/>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸⁰ Daily Monitor, “Ghetto TV cameraman hit by canister, says Enanga” 1 January 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/ghetto-tv-cameraman-hit-by-canister-says-enanga-3240646>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸¹ URN, “Two More Journalists Nursing Wounds after Police Attack in Masaka”, 27 December 2020, <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/two-journalists-nursing-wounds-as-police-battle-nup-supporters-in-masaka>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸² Twitter, “@ChapterfourUG”, 13 January 2021, <https://twitter.com/chapterfourug/status/1349383978013306883>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸³ Anadolu Agency, “Uganda: Police clobber 4 journalists, 3 lawmakers”, 17 February 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/uganda-police-clobber-4-journalists-3-lawmakers/2148518>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸⁴ Daily monitor, “Facebook accuses blocked top Uganda officials of engaging in 'inauthentic behaviour'”, 11 January 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/facebook-accuses-blocked-top-uganda-officials-of-engaging-in-inauthentic-behaviour—3253498>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸⁵ YouTube, “President Museveni speaks ahead of Thursday elections”, 12 January 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsFsAJtn0Io&t=1140s>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

Prior to the election, the internet was drastically slowed down, and social media and messaging services were only available when using a virtual private network (VPN). On the evening of 13 January 2021, a nationwide internet shutdown, which lasted for five days, started.¹⁸⁶ Although internet was restored on 18 January, social media and messaging platforms remained blocked and, at the time of writing, are only accessible through a VPN.¹⁸⁷ On 10 February 2021, social media access was restored by the government except Facebook.¹⁸⁸ The government alleged the interruption was required citing security concerns.

Freedom of association

Repression of political oppositions, and civil activists were widely reported during and after elections. On 22 December 2020, Head of Chapter Four Uganda and human rights lawyer, Nicolas Opiyo, and four of his colleagues, Dakasi Herbert, Odur Anthony, Esomu Obure and Tenywa Hamid, were arrested. Opiyo was charged with laundering over \$340,000 through Chapter Four's account. On 24 December 2020, Opiyo's four colleagues were released on bail. On 30 December 2020, Opiyo was granted bail and subsequently released from detention.¹⁸⁹

On 11 January 2021, presidential candidate Patrick Amuriat was arrested and detained for several hours when campaigning in Jinja town for the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party.¹⁹⁰ NUP leader Bobi Wine and his wife were placed on house arrest after he cast his vote on 14 January 2021.¹⁹¹ The army surrounded his home refusing him access to visitors including his lawyer and the US Ambassador.

On 14 January 2021, police raided Hotel Africana in Kampala, and arrested at least 25 data clerks and two civil society organisation staff, namely Isabella Akiteng from Femme Forte

¹⁸⁶ CNN, "Uganda's lesson to other authoritarians: controlling the internet works", 16 January 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/18/africa/uganda-election-internet-intl-hnk/index.html>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸⁷ BBC, "Uganda election: Internet restored but social media blocked", 18 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55705404>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸⁸ Voice of America, "Ugandan Government Restores Social Media Sites, Except Facebook", 10 February 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ugandan-government-restores-social-media-sites-except-facebook>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁸⁹ Jurist, "Uganda human rights activist-lawyer Nicholas Opiyo freed on bail", 30 December 2020, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2020/12/ugandan-human-rights-activist-lawyer-nicholas-opiyo-freed-on-bail/>, Accessed 8 April 2021,

¹⁹⁰ The East African, "Uganda's opposition presidential candidate arrested over traffic offence", 11 January 2021, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uganda-s-opposition-presidential-candidate-arrested-over-traffic-offence-3253204>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁹¹ Voice of America, "Uganda Restores Internet, Keeps Opposition Leader in House Detention", 18 January 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/uganda-restores-internet-keeps-opposition-leader-house-detention>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

Uganda and Perry Aritua from Women's Democracy Network Uganda.¹⁹² The CSOs had set up an election observation centre. All were later released on bail.

On 3 February 2021, political activist Dr. Stella Nyanzi fled to Kenya, where she sought asylum due to the fear of persecution by the Ugandan government.¹⁹³ Similarly, on 2 March 2021, several NUP party members fled to Kenya due to fear of political prosecution.¹⁹⁴

The enforced disappearance of opposition supporters is alarming. On 13 March, four NUP supporters re-emerged after being held in an unknown location since January 2021.¹⁹⁵ On 11 March 2021, Human Rights Watch released a statement condemning the enforced disappearance, unlawful detentions and torture of opposition supporters.¹⁹⁶ On 5 March 2021, the opposition party alleged that 423 people were abducted and remained missing. It claimed that its supporters who reappeared had injuries that indicate they were tortured. 89 out of the 423 missing people were accounted for by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹⁹⁷

On 13 April 2021, a group of UN human rights experts called on the government of Uganda to “immediately stop the brutal crackdown on its political opponents which began in the lead-up to January’s disputed general elections and continues to suppress opposition supporters” The experts indicated that they were “particularly alarmed by the reports of widespread and continued repression against opposition leaders and their supporters” and urged the authorities to immediately and thoroughly investigate and prosecute all human rights violations, including allegations of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, torture and ill treatment, deprivation of due process of law and assault on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Twitter, “@amnestyinternational”, 15 January 2021, <https://twitter.com/AmnestyKenya/status/1350066812772372480>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁹³ Daily Monitor, “Stella Nyanzi flees to Kenya”, 4 February 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/stella-nyanzi-flees-to-kenya-3278688>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁹⁴ All Africa, “Uganda: Busia Nup Supporters Flee for Fear of Arrest”, 2 March 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202103020685.html>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁹⁵ Daily Monitor, “Four Bobi supporters dumped in Mpigi swamp, scores still missing”, 13 March 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/four-bobi-supporters-dumped-in-mpigi-swamp-scores-still-missing-3321704>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Uganda: End Enforced Disappearances of Opponents”, 11 March 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/11/uganda-end-enforced-disappearances-opponents>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁹⁷ Anadolu Agency, “Uganda opposition leader says 423 supporters missing”, 5 March 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/uganda-opposition-leader-says-423-supporters-missing/2165791>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁹⁸ OHCHR, “Uganda: UN experts extremely concerned at serious rights violations linked to general elections,” 13 April 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26988&LangID=E>, Accessed 14 April 2021.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Repression of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly has increased in Uganda. The authorities are misusing COVID-19 regulations to restrict political protests against the government. On 18 November 2020, Robert Kyagulanyi was arrested ahead of a planned campaign rally, in Jinja, for breaking COVID-19 regulations by mobilising crowds.¹⁹⁹ The news of his arrest sparked protests in Kampala and other areas, with supporters blocking roads and burning car tyres.²⁰⁰ The police responded by firing live bullets and teargas, with reports that they fired indiscriminately into buildings. The protests continued for three days, and in total at least 45 people were killed, dozens injured, and over 800 arrested.²⁰¹

On 17 February 2021, Bobi Wine supporters were warned against joining him as he presented his petition concerning the recent elections to the UN office.²⁰² The police spokesperson announced that only three people would be able to join him due to COVID-19 restrictions, threatening to arrest and prosecute supporters breaking the directives.

On 17 January 2021, protests broke out in two areas of Uganda, one district north of Kampala and another in the southwest, after the elections were announced.²⁰³ Two people were reportedly killed by security forces and at least 23 arrested during the protests.

On 14 March 2021, Bobi Wine and approximately 15 members of his NUP party were briefly arrested and released during a peaceful protest demonstrating against the torture, abduction and murder of his supporters.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Human rights Watch, “Uganda: Authorities Weaponize Covid-19 for Repression” 20 November 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/20/uganda-authorities-weaponize-covid-19-repression>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

²⁰⁰ Voice of America, “Chaos Erupts in Kampala Following Arrest of Opposition Leader Bobi Wine”, 18 November 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/chaos-erupts-kampala-following-arrest-opposition-leader-bobi-wine>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

²⁰¹ PM daily, “Security confirm 836 arrests, 45 deaths in Bobi Wine protests”, 24 November 2020, <https://www.pmeldaily.com/news/2020/11/security-confirm-836-arrests-45-deaths-in-bobi-wine-protests.html>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

²⁰² NilePost, “Bobi Wine can take his petition to UN offices with only 3 people- Police”, 17 February 2021, <https://nilepost.co.ug/2021/02/17/bobi-wine-can-take-his-petition-to-un-offices-with-only-3-people-police/>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

²⁰³ Reuters, “Ugandan opposition party says it will challenge election result; two dead in protests”, 17 January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-uganda-election/ugandan-opposition-party-says-it-will-challenge-election-result-two-dead-in-protests-idUSKBN29M0BR>, Accessed 8 April 2021.

²⁰⁴ Aljazeera, “Uganda’s opposition leader Bobi Wine arrested during protest”, 15 March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/ugandas-opposition-leader-bobi-wine-arrested-during-protest>, Accessed 8 April 2021.