

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

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# BANJUL, THE GAMBIA, APRIL 2024 DefendDefenders' Bi-Annual Report to the ACHPR

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#### **Executive summary**

DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) welcomes the opportunity offered by the 79th ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights ("the Commission") to highlight the most pressing human rights issues in the East and Horn of Africa sub-region for the period October 2023 to April 2024.

This submission focuses on issues pertaining to civic space, in particular citizens' enjoyment of their rights to freedoms of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly, and association, as well as the situation of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).

During the reporting period, the sub-region faced significant human rights challenges, including restrictions on civic freedoms like freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, alongside ongoing conflict and violence in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. There has also been a concerning trend of harassment, intimidation, and attacks targeting HRDs online access to information and freedom of expression. Similarly, Uganda saw assaults and intimidation targeting HRDs, civil society actors, and media personnel. The CIVICUS Monitor ranks the civic space of Eritrea and Djibouti as closed. Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi are ranked as repressed while Kenya is ranked as obstructed.

#### Burundi

Burundi witnessed persistent human rights violations in the reporting period. Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly continue to be curtailed. While the government has introduced reforms to abolish prison sentences for journalists facing ethics complaints, concerns persisted regarding the release of incarcerated journalists. For instance, journalist Floriane Irangabiye remains in detention on a 10-year prison sentence in bad conditions. Furthermore, the United Nations Committee Against Torture expressed serious concerns about widespread allegations of torture, mainly perpetrated by state agents and Imbonerakure militia members, a youth wing of the ruling Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD).

**Djibouti** and **Eritrea** remain the most closed states in the sub-region, both ranking amongst the world's worst violators of press freedom. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) continues to rank Eritrea as one of the worst jailers of journalists globally. The rights to free expression, association and peaceful assembly continue to be severely restricted, making it virtually impossible for independent human rights organisations or individual HRDs to operate in the country. Additionally, HRDs face increased risks of reprisals for engaging with regional and international human rights mechanisms. Six years on, Djiboutian HRD, Kadar Abdi Ibrahim, who was deprived of his passport following advocacy he conducted in Geneva in April 2018, remains unable to

leave the country. In March 2024, Kadar Abdi Ibrahim called for an end to state-sponsored reprisals against him, in an oral statement delivered on behalf of DefendDefenders.

#### Ethiopia

Ethiopia's human rights situation worsened with escalating violence and conflict in Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray. The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) reported widespread atrocities across Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions, revealing systematic abuses including attacks against civilians, ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, and arbitrary arrests. In February 2024, the Ethiopian government extended the state of emergency in Amhara, giving the government broad powers that increase the risk of arbitrary detention. The Ethiopia Human Rights Center reported that over 48 HRDs were unjustly detained in 2023, and women, especially WHRDs, suffered gender-based violence (GBV), sexism, and discrimination. Ethiopian citizen's enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression was extremely curtailed as several journalists were harassed, intimidated, and arrested. Additionally, the government has repeatedly restricted access to the internet and social media in conflict areas.

#### Kenya

Kenya's civic space remains relatively open in the subregion; however, it continues to grapple with corruption, and human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and torture. Security forces routinely violate the right to freedom of assembly by using excessive force to suppress protests, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries, arbitrary arrests, and detentions. Additionally, freedom of expression continues to be stifled as journalists investigating corruption and governance issues face threats and arbitrary arrests. GBV and femicide rates surged, with over 8 cases documented in 2024 alone. HRDs operating in conflict-ridden regions like Baringo, Samburu, Elgeyo Marakwet, West Pokot, and Turkana increasingly became targets of rival communities.

#### Rwanda

In the past six months, Rwanda witnessed a concerning trend of political repression and human rights violations perpetrated by the ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and its proxies. As the country approaches its 2024 general elections, the space for political opposition remains tightly closed, both within and outside the ruling party. The government targeted and harassed activists, journalists, and other critics. The RPF government employed various measures, including condemnations during public gatherings, to suppress perceived opponents and dissenting voices.

#### Somalia/Somaliland

Somalia grapples with a humanitarian crisis due to climate change, widespread human rights violations, and ongoing conflicts. Al Shabab continues to control territory and to commit grave human rights abuses with several attacks against civilians in this period. Furthermore, GBV surged, disproportionately impacting displaced women and girls. Civic

space remains under intense pressure in Somalia, one of the most dangerous places to be a journalist. Journalists are constantly targeted, harassed, arrested, and attacked by both the state and non-state actors. In October 2023, the United Nations HRC extended the mandate of the Independent Expert on Somalia's human rights situation, emphasizing grave violations and abuses.

#### South Sudan

Over the past six months in South Sudan, an increase in human rights violations has occurred amidst preparations for the first election in December 2024. The country has witnessed persistent systematic repression, characterized by media censorship, targeting of journalists and activists, and widespread abuses by armed forces and militias. Civil society operated under severe constraints, and journalists and HRDs continue to face attacks, contributing to a climate of censorship and civic activity restriction. National Security Service (NSS) agents have been actively involved in media censorship and the arrest of political activists, further exacerbating the situation. The ongoing armed conflict has led to civilian casualties and mass displacement. Widespread sexual violence continues to be a serious issue. Furthermore, the recruitment and use of child soldiers emerged as significant concerns.

#### Sudan

Sudan faces a complex human rights crisis marked by a significant increase in violations across various fronts. The ongoing one-year conflict has claimed over 12,190 lives and displaced millions, leaving 25 million reliant on humanitarian aid. Nearly 18 million individuals experience severe food insecurity, worsened by humanitarian workers facing obstacles in reaching those in need. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) continue to block aid deliveries through vital crossing points, impose restrictions on transporting aid supplies, and ban civil society groups, alleging collaboration with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Tragically, paramilitary groups, such as the RSF, have weaponised Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) as a war tactic, targeting women and girls. Children are subjected to arbitrary arrests and recruitment into armed forces Journalists and media workers are increasingly subjected to attacks, forced closure of newspapers and radio stations, thus stifling freedom of expression. Peaceful civic activities have been banned in several States, including the Blue Nile and Red Sea regions. Additionally, Sudan experienced internet shutdowns and curfew enforcement, obstructing efforts to address the root causes of unrest. Notably, hate speech has escalated, particularly targeting advocates. Resistance Committees, pro-peace activists, community leaders, humanitarian workers, medical personnel, journalists, and political party members all faced direct threats during the reporting period.

#### Tanzania

During the reporting period, the Tanzanian government suppressed dissenting voices. Authorities restricted access to information by imposing bans on VPN without permits to regulate access to content deemed "illicit". Journalists, notably women journalists, endured targeted abuse and harassment, fostering a climate of fear and self-censorship. Additionally, unknown gunmen attempted to assassinate Tanzanian politician Christopher Ole Sendeka, a Member of Parliament for Simanjiro, by shooting at his car with bullets. Despite vocal opposition and widespread protests, the government neglected to address the relentless forced relocation of the Maasai communities. Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) faced repression, particularly concerning their opposition to the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project. Furthermore, reprisals against HRDs persisted, particularly on journalists, lawyers, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

#### Uganda

Uganda grappled with significant human rights challenges. HRDs, civil society actors, and media personnel suffered assaults, violence, and intimidation. Critics covering sensitive topics, opposition figures, and protesters faced government intimidation tactics, including surveillance, harassment, and threats aimed at silencing dissenting voices and discouraging public demonstrations. In April 2024, the Constitutional Court of Uganda upheld most provisions of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, including the death penalty in some cases, despite global criticism. While sections related to healthcare access and renting were invalidated, challenges to the law's constitutionality were rejected. As a result, minority groups and HRDs addressing these issues persistently face unjust and arbitrary detentions. Furthermore, the government continued to crackdown on anti-fossil fuel activists and environmental defenders. Authorities detained journalists and curtailed freedom of expression.

#### Recommendations

Considering these trends, DefendDefenders makes the following recommendations to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights:

- Urge all member States to ensure the protection of HRDs, notably by observing the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the provisions and spirit of the United Nations Declaration on HRDs.
- Strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms across all countries to address human rights violations, ensuring a culture of respect for human rights where perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.
- Call for open civic space in all countries, opposing censorship, violence against journalists and activists, and any restrictions on civil society participation.
- Call for unrestricted access to independent media, regional, and international human rights organizations across all countries for effective monitoring and documentation of human rights abuses.
- Call for an end to harassment and violence against journalists, dissenting voices, and activists across all countries, ensuring respect for freedom of expression and assembly.

- Engage the Djiboutian government in dialogue to encourage legislative reforms aligning with international human rights standards, emphasizing the importance of fostering an enabling environment for civil society and safeguarding fundamental freedoms for all citizens.
- Call for the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burundi to ensure continued oversight and reporting.
- Urge concerted pressure on the Governments of Burundi and Tanzania to end initiatives towards forced repatriation of refugees and instead promote a policy of free and voluntary repatriation.
- Call on Rwanda to establish an independent electoral monitoring mechanism to guarantee free, fair, and inclusive elections.
- Call on Sudanese authorities to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid organizations and agencies, ensuring unhindered access to conflict-affected areas and populations in need.
- Call on the Ethiopian government to immediately end communications blackouts in affected zones, uphold freedom of expression, and ensure transparency in accordance with international human rights standards.
- Urge the Tanzanian government to cease the arrest and harassment of journalists and lift bans on Virtual Private Networks in order to uphold freedom of expression and media freedom.
- Urge the Kenyan government to enact or strengthen legal and institutional reforms, including appropriate legislative and administrative measures, to tackle discrimination against women, as well as discrimination and violence targeting minority groups and women.
- Urge states to review and amend any unconstitutional clauses in regulations concerning the freedom of assembly and police use of force, ensuring that force is restricted to being a last resort and is only employed in fully justified circumstances.

# Burundi

## **General situation**

Human rights violations continue to be widespread in Burundi.<sup>1</sup> These include attacks on the right to life, instances of torture, high rates of kidnappings, enforced disappearances, and GBV. In 2023, ACAT-Burundi recorded 937 violations, the Ligue Iteka, reported 1420 violations, and SOS-TORTURE recorded 870 cases of violations.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 November 2023, the United Nations Committee Against Torture concluded its review of Burundi's third periodic report on implementing the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. While commending Burundi for repatriating refugees and hosting others, the Committee raised grave concerns about widespread allegations of torture.<sup>3</sup> These allegations were perpetrated by the Burundian police force, security forces particularly the National Intelligence Service, and the Imbonerakure militia, the youth branch of the ruling CNDD-FDD party. Reported violations include torture, extrajudicial killings, SGBV, and enforced disappearances, involving both state agents and Imbonerakure members.

On 30 November 2023, the governments of Burundi and Tanzania agreed to promote voluntary repatriation for Burundian refugees in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement of May 2001.<sup>4</sup> Despite this agreement, threats of forced repatriation loom over more than 100,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania if they do not return voluntarily.

On 11 March 2024, the National Congress for Freedom (CNL) elected Nestor Girukwishaka as president for a five-year term, controversially ousting Burundi's CNL party leader Agathon Rwasa while he was on a trip to Tanzania attending an ACT-Wazalendo convention.<sup>5</sup> The Pan African Opposition Leaders Network accused the Burundian government of colluding with CNL rebels to unlawfully seize party leadership from Rwasa.

<sup>3</sup> OHCHR, "Experts of the Committee against Torture Commend Burundi on Efforts to Repatriate Burundian Refugees, Ask about Acts of Torture Committed by the Burundian Police Force and Security Forces and about the Role of the Imbonerakure", 1 November 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/on/news/2023/11/experts-committee-against-torture-commend-burundia

https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/11/experts-committee-against-torture-commend-burundiefforts-repatriate-burundian, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> ACAT Burundi, Rapport de monitoring des violations et atteintes aux droits humains recense pour mars 2024, 2024, <u>https://www.acatburundi.org/.</u> accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> SOS Torture Burundi, Mapping of human rights violations in Burundi, December 2023, https://sostortureburundi.org/, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>UNHCR, "UNHCR, Governments of Burundi and Tanzania agree to scale up voluntary repatriation to Burundi," 30 November 2023,<u>https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/press-releases/unhcr-governmentsburundi-and-tanzania-agree-scale-voluntary-repatriation</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The Citizen, "How Burundi opposition party leader was dethroned while on a trip to Tanzania," <u>https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/how-burundi-opposition-party-leader-was-dethroned-while-on-a-trip-to-tanzania-4554740</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

#### Freedom of association

On 25 December 2023, three Imbonerakure members, Olivier Nduwimana, Déogratias Bakundumuhari, and Léopold Niyongabo, brutally attacked Pascal Ndereyimana, an activist affiliated with the opposition CNL party.<sup>6</sup> They severely injured Ndereyimana, leaving him unconscious. Despite clear identification of the assailants and a filed complaint, authorities have not initiated an investigation, and the perpetrators remain free.

On 10 March 2024, police officers and Imbonerakure arbitrarily arrested six activists of the CNL party for unknown reasons.<sup>7</sup> Among those arrested were prominent figures such as Agnès Nibirantije, Cyriaque Hasabumutima, and Goreth Nyandwi, who were attending a dissident congress at the Oasis hotel to elect new party leaders. These individuals were subsequently taken to undisclosed locations.

#### Freedom of opinion and expression

On 26 January 2024, authorities arrested Emilienne Sibomana, the secretary of Christ Roi technical high school in Mushasha, after she publicly denounced the school director for alleged sexual abuse of students.<sup>8</sup> On 17 February 2024, the Gitega Court of Appeal in central Burundi accused her of slanderous denunciation against the school director.<sup>9</sup> She received a five-year prison sentence, a fine of five million Burundian francs and remains incarcerated.

On 13 February 2024, the Burundian Supreme Court upheld a 10-year prison sentence against journalist Floriane Irangabiye.<sup>10</sup> Floriane has been detained in Bubanza Prison since her arrest in 2022. Her health continues to deteriorate due to a longstanding condition.

On 16 February 2024, the Burundi government abolished prison sentences for journalists facing ethics complaints and instead introduced fines ranging from \$350 to \$523.<sup>11</sup> Cases

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> SOS Torture Burundi, "SOS-TORTURE BURUNDI REPORT NO. 420 PUBLISHED ON 31 DECEMBER 2023", <u>https://sostortureburundi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Weekly-report no 420.pdfm</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>SOS Torture Burundi, "RAPPORT N° 431 DE SOS-TORTURE BURUNDI PUBLIE LE 17 MARS 2024," 17 March 2024, <u>https://sostortureburundi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Rapport-hebdomadaire-n%C2%B0-431-.pdf</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> SOS Media, "la Cour d'appel accusée de manœuvres dilatoires dans l'affaire Émilienne Sibomana," 17 February 2024, <u>https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2024/02/17/gitega-la-cour-supreme-accusee-de-manoeuvres-dilatoires-dans-laffaire-emilienne-sibomana/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024. 9Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, "journalist's conviction must be overturned", 2023,

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/journalists-conviction-must-be-overturned, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Voice Of America, "Burundi Takes Steps to Decriminalize Journalism",

<sup>16</sup> February 2024, <u>https://www.voanews.com/a/burundi-takes-steps-to-decriminalize-journalism/7490544.html</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

will be referred to judges to determine fines based on offense severity. However, concerns persist about the release of jailed journalists like Floriane Irangabiye, as the bill awaits further legislative stages before enactment.

# Djibouti

#### **General situation**

In Djibouti, authorities continue to suppress fundamental rights such as freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression, leaving no room for independent media. Citizens are intimidated and this creates an atmosphere of fear that enables extensive government control.<sup>12</sup>

On 9 November 2023, the HRC reviewed Djibouti's human rights record in the context of its UPR.<sup>13</sup> 100 States made 266 recommendations, addressing a range of issues, including freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. The UPR is one of the only opportunities, at the international level, to shed light on Djibouti's human rights record.

Six years on, Kadar Abdi Ibrahim, who was deprived of his passport following advocacy he conducted in Geneva in April 2018, remains unable to leave the country.<sup>14</sup> His case has been mentioned in the annual report of the UN Secretary-General on reprisals since.<sup>15</sup> On the occasion of the adoption of the report on Djibouti's fourth UPR, in March 2024, Kadar Abdi Ibrahim called for an end to state-sponsored reprisals against him, in an oral statement delivered for DefendDefenders.

#### Eritrea

#### **General situation**

In 2024, Human Rights Watch noted that Eritrean authorities in the past year persistently suppressed fundamental rights, including freedom of opinion and expression and of religion or belief, and escalated their use of enforced disappearances, unlawful detentions, and forced mass conscription.<sup>16</sup> Eritrean security forces committed serious

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Mena Rights Group, "Djibouti's human rights record reviewed at its fourth UPR session",14 November 2023, <u>https://www.menarights.org/en/articles/djiboutis-human-rights-record-reviewed-its-fourth-upr-session</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> FIDH, "Reprisals against human rights defender Kadar Abdi Ibrahim upon his return from an advocacy mission in Geneva", 18 April 2018,

https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/djibouti-reprisals-against-human-rightsdefender-kadar-abdi-ibrahim, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> OHCHR, "Annual reports on reprisals for cooperation with the UN",

https://www.ohchr.org/en/reprisals/annual-reports-reprisals-cooperation-un, accessed on 5 April 2024. <sup>16</sup>Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2024", <u>https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/eritrea#:~:text=Eritrea%20continues%20to%20suppress%20basic,violations%20in%20Ethiopia's%20Tigray%20region</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

rights violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region, and the government continued to detain and deny religious freedom to individuals whose religious affiliation does not align with the four denominations officially recognized in the country.

## Freedom of opinion and expression

On 1 December 2023, Eritrea ranked seventh-worst jailer of journalists in CPJ's annual prison census on the state of global press freedom, with 16 journalists in prison. Notably, Eritrea was ranked the worst jailer of journalists on the African continent. Detainees, including individuals involved in some of the longest-standing cases worldwide and detained incommunicado, have never faced formal charges. Their fate and whereabouts remain unknown.<sup>17</sup>

#### Ethiopia

# **General situation**

On 25 October 2023, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) highlighted widespread evidence of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions.<sup>18</sup> Commissioners reported ongoing injustice despite a ceasefire, including executions, torture, sexual violence, and attacks on children. They criticized Ethiopia for its 'quasi-compliance' in establishing accountability processes. To this day, Ethiopia grapples with conflict, violence, and loss of lives.<sup>19</sup>

In January 2024, Ethiopian women-led civil society organisations voiced criticism regarding the exclusion of women from the negotiations held in Pretoria and Tanzania.<sup>20</sup> They emphasized the suffering experienced by women during conflicts and demanded their active involvement as negotiators between the government, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and other armed groups. Additionally, they stressed the necessity for women to be recognized as beneficiaries in future agreements, highlighting the crucial role of gender equality in advancing peace efforts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> African Centre For Media Excellence, "CPJ's annual prison census reveals alarming trends in global press freedom", 19 January 2024, <u>https://acme-ug.org/2024/01/19/cpjs-annual-prison-census-reveals-alarming-trends-in-global-press-freedom/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Addis Standard, "UN rights experts call for continued monitoring of human rights violations in Ethiopia", 27 October 2023, <u>https://addisstandard.com/news-ichree-calls-for-continued-monitoring-of-human-rights-situation-in-ethiopia/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Addis Standard, "Residents gripped by fear after 15 killed following heavy fighting between gov't forces, OLA in Hidhabu Abote, Oromia region", 22 March 2024, <u>https://addisstandard.com/news-residents-gripped-by-fear-after-15-killed-following-heavy-fighting-between-govt-forces-ola-in-hidhabu-abote-oromia-region/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> "Women-led civil societies in Ethiopia call for sustained dialogue with armed groups, inclusion of women in peace talks", 8 February 2024, <u>https://addisstandard.com/news-women-led-civil-societies-in-ethiopia-call-for-sustained-dialogue-with-armed-groups-inclusion-of-women-in-peace-talks/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

On 2 February 2024, Ethiopian lawmakers extended the six-month state of emergency in the Amhara region by four months.<sup>21</sup> Critics highlighted violations including the right to access information, arrests without a court warrant, curfew, limitations on the right to freedom of movement, and the prohibition of public assemblies or associations.

On 26 February 2024, armed militants killed four priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) in the Oromia Region.<sup>22</sup> The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) urged the EOTC to review its role as a religious and moral authority in the country, citing its "selective voicing" during recent conflicts. Oromia's peace and security bureau pledged to track down the perpetrators and urged local community cooperation.

# Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 7 December 2023, the Ethiopian government detained four coordinators allegedly involved in organizing a planned anti-war demonstration.<sup>23</sup> Despite the organizers submitting a notification to the Addis Ababa City Administration Security Division as required by the Ethiopian constitution, both federal and city administrations threatened them. The government justified its decision to ban the peaceful demonstration on the grounds of security concerns.

#### Freedom of opinion and expression

On 11 September 2023, police officers arrested Yehualashet Zerihun, the program director of Tirita 97.6 FM, a privately owned radio station, without formal charges.<sup>24</sup>

On 13 November 2023, uniformed police officers, arrested Belay, the chief editor of a private YouTube-based news outlet. He is currently detained at the Federal Police Crime Investigation Center, where authorities continue to hold him without explanation or a court appearance.<sup>25</sup>

On 1December 2023, the CPJ disclosed in its annual prison census that Ethiopia detained eight journalists for reporting on the Amhara conflict, with Ethiopia ranking as the second

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Amnesty International, "Authorities must stop using state of emergency law to silence peaceful dissent", 19 February 2024, <u>https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/ethiopia-authorities-must-stop-using-state-of-emergency-law-to-silence-peaceful-dissent/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Addis Standard, "OLF calls for independent investigation into recent killing of EOTC priests" 21 March 2024, <u>https://addisstandard.com/news-olf-calls-for-independent-investigation-into-recent-killing-of-eotc-priests/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> APA news, "Ethiopia detains four anti-war protest planners," 7 December 2024, <u>https://apanews.net/ethiopia-detains-four-anti-war-demo-leaders/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> CPJ, "Three journalists detained in Ethiopia, transferred to military camp", 5 October 2024, <u>https://cpj.org/2023/10/three-journalists-detained-in-ethiopia-transferred-to-military-camp/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> CPJ, "Ethiopian authorities detain Ethio News chief editor Belay Manaye without charge",
 4 December 2023, <u>https://cpj.org/2023/12/ethiopian-authorities-detain-ethio-news-chief-editor-belay-manaye-without-charge/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

worst jailer of journalists in the region. <sup>26</sup> Among the detained journalists, half face charges related to anti-state activities, including allegations of 'spreading fear among the public', while the others await formal charges.

On 22 February 2024, plainclothes security officers detained French journalist Antoine Galindo while he interviewed Bate Urgessa, a political officer with the OLF, a party legally recognized in Ethiopia.<sup>27</sup> Despite holding a valid journalist visa, authorities extended his detention until 1 March to access his phone records and pursue other suspects.<sup>28</sup>

On 2 March 2024, Ethiopian authorities detained several journalists associated with the "Adwa barefoot" project and later released them on bail terms.<sup>29</sup> The project commemorates Adwa Victory Day, where its members walk bare foot symbolizing resistance against Italian colonialism. Among those detained were journalists from Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, Fano Broadcasting Corporate, and Bisrat Mengistu, a journalist from FBC.

On 12 March 2024, Ethiopian security forces detained journalist Muhiyadin Mohamed Abdullahi, renowned for his reporting and commentary on his Muxiyediin show Facebook page, accusing him of inciting unrest and spreading false information.<sup>30</sup> Investigations uncovered no evidence supporting these allegations. Prior to his arrest, Muhiyadin had voiced concerns about threats to his reporting on Facebook and had announced his intention to leave the Somali Regional State due to threats from both the ruling party and the opposition for his critical commentary.

Kenya

#### **General situation**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> CPJ,"Israel among top jailers of journalists worldwide, as imprisonments globally continue unabated, CPJ finds", 18 January 2024, <u>https://cpj.org/2024/01/israel-among-top-jailers-of-journalists-worldwide-as-imprisonments-globally-continue-unabated-cpj-</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;u>finds/#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20the%20top%20three.top%20five%20jailers%20of%20journalists</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> CPJ, "French journalist Antoine Galindo detained in Ethiopia", 26 February 2024,

https://cpj.org/2024/02/french-journalist-antoine-galindo-detained-in-ethiopia/, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> "Barefoot Club member Journalists Held Captive in Adwa Celebration Crackdown," 2 March 2024, <u>https://borkena.com/2024/03/02/ethiopia-barefoot-club-member-journalists-held-captive-in-adwa-celebration-crackdown/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> CPJ, "Ethiopian journalist Muhiyadin Mohamed Abdullahi faces up to 5 years in prison on false news charges." 12 March 2024, <u>https://cpj.org/2024/03/ethiopian-journalist-muhiyadin-mohamed-abdullahi-faces-up-to-5-years-in-prison-on-false-news-charges/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

In recent years, femicide has persistently escalated. However, in 2024, the situation worsened significantly. Statistics reveal that within the first two weeks of the year, perpetrators brutally murdered eight young women. Moreover, data from January 2016 to December 2023 indicates that at least 500 women became victims of femicide, with many cases tragically going unreported.<sup>31</sup> The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime documented 706 femicide victims in Kenya alone in 2022. In response to this crisis, thousands of women and concerned citizens across major towns mobilized, demanding swift action against SGBV, shedding light on systemic gaps in government responses, and fervently advocating for justice.

#### Freedom of association

In January 2024, armed bandits suspected to be from the neighboring community fatally shot three peace ambassadors in the Kesoch area of Marakwet West. The three were on a peace mission aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence to address the heightened tension caused by armed bandits in Kerio Valley, where over 300 lives have been claimed in the ongoing violence. <sup>32</sup>

On 9 February 2024, a group of more than seven armed individuals brutally attacked Chris Owalla, a human rights defender advocating for social and environmental justice, as he left the funeral of local journalist, Dickens Ochieng Wasonga.<sup>33</sup> This attack is believed to be linked to his prior complaints against the County Government of Siaya regarding the mismanagement of public funds.

# Freedom of peaceful assembly

In the past months, Kenyan police have used undue violence to disperse protests, targeting demonstrators. However, positively, it witnessed a peaceful nationwide protest on the surge in femicide, as police refrained from using force. Thousands of women and concerned citizens rallied in major towns, demanding action against SGBV, and highlighting gaps in government responses while calling for justice.

On 11 October 2023, police arrested three pro-Palestinian protesters following a peaceful social gathering organized by the Kenya Palestinian Solidarity Committee at Cheche

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Aljazeera, "Thousands march to protest against femicide in Kenya," 27 January 2024, <u>https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/1/27/stop-killing-us-thousands-march-to-protest-against-femicide-in-kenya</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> You tube, " NTV Kenya" 5 January 2024,

https://www.google.com/search?q=rmed+criminals+suspected+to+be+from+the+neighboring+communi ty+shot+dead+three+peace+ambassadors,+including+a+primary+teacher.&sca\_esv=f69dae79bff16cff&pr md=nivsbmz&source=lnms&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi43-

aq77qFAxVh\_7sIHXTMAdEQ0pQJegQIBhAC&biw=1440&bih=779&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:2dfed37c, vid:GK0tqJGvAE8,st:0, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Frontline Defenders, Human Rights Defender Chris Owalla brutally attacked "9 February 2024, <u>https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-chris-owalla-brutally-attacked</u>,

Bookshop and Cafe.<sup>34</sup> The motives behind the arrests and the specific charges against the detained protesters remain unclear. In a similar incident, on 22 October 2023, the National Police Service dispersed, and subsequently arrested individuals gathered in support of Palestine and occupied territories to express solidarity amidst the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.<sup>35</sup>

On 26 January 2024, Kenyan police used tear gas to disperse protests and arrested human rights activists staging a protest in solidarity with Palestinians, despite having obtained permission through a permit.<sup>36</sup> According to protester Lali Yusuf, law enforcement authorities subjected them to intimidation and force.

On 30 January 2024, police dispersed protesting youth outside Milimani Law Courts with tear gas.<sup>37</sup> The demonstrators opposed the court's ruling on the 1.5% levy for affordable housing funding, which was part of a finance law passed in June. The High Court deemed the levy unconstitutional, a decision upheld by the Court of Appeal despite the state's appeal. The court declined to suspend the High Court's judgment, citing public interest.

Kenyan doctors protested, demanding better pay and improved working conditions as part of an ongoing nationwide strike. They carried placards, expressed frustration, and cited unfulfilled promises of the signed 2017 collective bargaining agreement. The agreement had pledged to address their issues, including pay and other disputed matters.<sup>38</sup>On 1 March 2024, Kenyan police dispersed crowds of protestors rallying against delayed medical intern postings and poor working conditions using tear gas.<sup>39</sup> During the demonstration, over 20 protestors sustained injuries. Dr. Atellah, Secretary General of the Dentist Union (KMPDU) one of the protestors, suffered severe injuries from a tear gas canister. Despite protestors adhering to proper notification protocols and maintaining peaceful intentions, the police resorted to violent repression.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Keya Foreign Policy, "Pro-Palestinian Supporters Arrested in Nairobi", 22 October 2023, <u>https://kenyanforeignpolicy.com/pro-palestinian-protestors-arrested-in-nairobi/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Africa news, " pro-Palestine protesters targeted by police",26 January 2024,

https://www.africanews.com/2024/01/25/kenya-pro-palestine-protesters-targeted-by-police/, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> The Star, "Cops lob teargas at youth protesting housing levy ruling", 30 January 2024, <u>https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2024-01-30-cops-lob-teargas-at-youth-protesting-over-housing-levy-ruling/</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Aljazeera, "Kenya doctors end strike after deal with government," 15 March 2017, <u>https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/3/15/kenya-doctors-end-strike-after-deal-with-government</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> The Star, " ICJ asks IPOA to probe Devji Attellah's teargas assault incident, " 29 February 2024, <u>https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2024-02-29-icj-asks-ipoa-to-probe-devji-attellahs-teargas-assault-incident/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

#### Freedom of opinion and expression

On 16 December 2023, authorities discovered the body of political activist and blogger Daniel Muthiani, known as Sniper, who had been missing since 2 December 2023. Government pathologist Johansen Oduor, who examined the body, confirmed that he died from being\_strangled.<sup>40</sup> The examination revealed marks on his neck, indicating signs of oxygen deprivation. Additionally, Sniper exhibited fractured ribs and head injuries, suggesting he was strangled before being thrown into a river. The Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) stated that further investigations are ongoing, to bring all perpetrators involved in Sniper's murder to justice with four suspects currently under investigation, including a police officer and a local DJ, awaiting trial.

On 5 January 2024, club bouncers assaulted five journalists and multiple officers during a drug enforcement operation at Nairobi Kettle House Bar as authorities cracked down on a drug raid in Kenya.<sup>41</sup> Among the journalists, Jane Kibira of KBC suffered a stab wound in the back, while Boniface Bogita and Bonface Okendo sustained serious injuries. Lawrence Tikolo from Citizen TV got punched, and his camera was broken by the attackers. Medical personnel attended to the injured journalists, discharging Kibira while Bogita and Okendo received treatment and were reported to be recovering. Notably, the attackers confiscated Okendo's camera and memory card, and damaged Tikolo's camera.

On 25 January 2024, authorities assaulted and arrested Millian Nyamoita, a human rights defender from Mukuru community justice center, and a citizen journalist with Sema Ukweli, for documenting police brutality in Mukuru slum.<sup>42</sup>

On 1 February 2024, officers from the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission assaulted Osinde Obare, a correspondent with the Standard Media Group, while he attempted to film the arrest of a traffic police officer caught accepting bribes from motorists on the Kitale-Kapenguria road.<sup>43</sup> During the argument, the journalist endured multiple slaps, and his phone got damaged.

On 4 April 2024, a member from a public office labeled John Allan, co-founder of Africa Uncensored and an investigative journalist, as a crook.<sup>44</sup> This accusation followed Allan's airing of a two-part documentary exposing a web of mining, packaging, and widespread

<sup>42</sup> Twitter, Sema Ukweli, 25 January 2024,

<sup>44</sup> Twitter, "Defenders Coalition" 6 April 2024,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Star, "More arrests expected in Snipper's murder – DCI", 20 January 2024, <u>https://www.the-</u>

star.co.ke/news/2024-01-20-more-arrests-expected-in-snippers-murder-dci/, accessed on 5 April 2024.
 <sup>41</sup> CPJ, "CPJ calls for investigation of attack on 5 Kenyan journalists reporting a raid on Nairobi bar",
 8 January 2024, <a href="https://cpj.org/2024/01/cpj-calls-for-investigation-of-attack-on-5-kenyan-journalists-reporting-a-raid-on-nairobi-bar/">https://cpj.org/2024/01/cpj-calls-for-investigation-of-attack-on-5-kenyan-journalists-reporting-a-raid-on-nairobi-bar/</a>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

https://twitter.com/SemaUkweliKenya/status/1750601835264561291, accessed on 5 April 2024. <sup>43</sup>Uasingishu, "Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) assault Standard Group Journalists, 1 February 2024, https://www.uasingishunews.co.ke/kitale-standard-group-journalist-assaulted-bysuspected-eac-officers/, accessed on 5 April 2024.

https://twitter.com/DefendersKE/status/1776592707915219041, accessed on 6 April 2024.

distribution of ordinary s and disguised as subsidized fertilizer, sold to farmers at inflated prices.  $^{\rm 45}$ 

## Rwanda

# **General situation**

As Rwanda approaches its 2024 elections, the RPF is tightening its grip on political opposition. According to media reports, journalists, commentators, opposition activists, and other citizens critical of current affairs and public policies in Rwanda face abusive prosecutions and enforced disappearances. Unexplained deaths have also repeatedly been reported. According to a Human Rights Watch report, even Rwandans living abroad practice self-censorship and live in fear of extraterritorial reprisals.<sup>46</sup> This raises concern over the fairness of the electoral process and over democratic participation in Rwanda.

On 11 January 2024, Burundi closed its borders with Rwanda, alleging that Rwanda supports the Red Tabara rebel group, responsible for an attack near Burundi's border with the DRC in December 2023.<sup>47</sup> Rwanda has denied the allegations, calling the border closure a breach of regional cooperation principles and expressing concerns about potential restrictions on free movement and communication between the two nations.

On 21 January 2024, Rwandan opposition figure Frank Ntwali, a survivor of an assassination attempt, strongly criticized the UK's plan to deport asylum seekers to Kigali. Ntwali, leader of the Rwanda National Congress, emphasized the country's safety concerns, calling British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's insistence on the policy "bizarre."<sup>48</sup>

# Freedom of association

The ruling RPF government continues to target perceived opponents, including through condemnations uttered during public gatherings. In 2024, Senior RPF officials criticized a clan meeting organized by influential leaders aiming to appoint a chief, denouncing it as "interference in the unity of Rwandans."<sup>49</sup> Subsequently, authorities detained and

<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Global Playbook of Abuse to Silence Critics",

 <sup>47</sup> BBC, "Burundi shuts borders with 'bad neighbour' Rwanda", 11 January 2024, <u>https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67940063</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.
 <sup>48</sup> Guardian, "Exiled Rwandan who survived murder attempt condemns UK deportation plan", <u>https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/jan/21/exiled-rwandan-survived-condemns-uk-deportation-plan-frank-ntwali</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Africa report, "Kenya fertiliser scam: Journalist vows to name politicians who tried to hush him" 5 April 2024,<u>https://www.theafricareport.com/343039/kenya-fake-fertiliser-scam-journalist-says-he-will-name-politicians-who-tried-to-hush-him-up/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>10</sup> October 2023, <u>https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/10/rwanda-global-playbook-abuse-silence-critics</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch, Rwanda events of 2023, 2024, "<u>https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/rwanda</u>, accessed on 5 April 2024.

interrogated senior party officials who participated in the ceremony, prompted by the circulation of pictures and videos capturing them dancing at the venue.

## **Freedom of expression**

On 10 January 2024, Dieudonné Niyonsenga, the owner of Ishema TV, testified in a Kigali court, detailing the confiscation of his trial-related documents and describing his threeyear detention marked by recurrent beatings, untreated impaired hearing, and deteriorating eyesight.<sup>50</sup> Authorities arrested him in April 2020 for reporting on the impact of COVID-19 guidelines and accused him of forgery and hindering public works. Although he was acquitted in March 2021, he was rearrested in November 2021.<sup>51</sup> Despite Niyonsenga's courtroom appeals regarding abuse, judicial authorities have not taken corrective action.

# Somalia/Somaliland

#### **General situation**

On 12 October 2023, the United Nations HRC adopted a resolution on Somalia, which among other elements extended the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia for one year.<sup>52</sup> While focusing on technical assistance and capacity-building, the resolution also outlines ongoing grave human rights violations and abuses committed in the country in a context of impunity. The Expert's mandate is one of the longest-standing country-specific special procedures of the HRC.

On 2 January 2024, Somalia strongly condemned Ethiopia's controversial agreement with the breakaway state of Somaliland, branding it as an act of "aggression."<sup>53</sup> This development has marked an escalation in the ongoing tensions, with Somalia reaffirming its commitment to safeguarding territorial integrity amidst heightened regional tensions.

On 28 January 2024, Puntland State President Said Abdullahi Deni, commencing his second term, requested an extension to establish a new government and council of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch, "End Abuses Against Journalists", 18 January 2024,

https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/18/rwanda-end-abuses-against-journalists, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> CIVICUS, "youtuber & government critic sentenced to prison",

https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/youtuber-government-critic-sentenced-prison/, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Twitter, "UNHRC", <u>https://twitter.com/UN\_HRC/status/1712505242095403518</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> France 24, "Somalia rejects Ethiopia-Somaliland deal as 'aggression'", 2 January 2024, <u>https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240102-somalia-to-hold-emergency-meeting-on-somaliland-ethiopia-deal</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

ministers.<sup>54</sup> He directed the existing cabinet to persist in their duties, and emphasised the necessity for thorough stakeholder engagement. Reports attributed delays partly to a scheduled foreign trip. Deni reaffirmed his commitment to unity during his Garowe inauguration ceremony, announcing intentions to assemble Somali politicians for inclusive dialogue.<sup>55</sup>

On 20 March 2024, Somali women MPs, accompanied by local activists, voiced concerns over the exclusion of a 30% women quota from constitutional amendments.<sup>56</sup> They condemned opposition to the quota on religious grounds and criticized officials for neglecting issues of violence against women while using religion to restrict women's participation in politics.

On 23 March 2024, Former Somali President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed criticized the current President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, for unilaterally changing the provisional constitution and warned against using social media trolls to attack political opponents.<sup>57</sup> Some of the amendments include the establishment of a President-appointed Prime Minister, the introduction of a five-year term for government bodies, and the approval of measures proposed by the Independent Constitutional Review and Implementation Commission (ICRIC), such as setting the age of maturity for girls at 15 and criminalizing female genital mutilation.<sup>58</sup> Ahmed also highlighted escalating clan-based animosity manipulated to stifle dissent, asserting that these actions pose a severe threat to national stability.

#### Freedom of opinion and expression

On 12 October 2023, it was reported that the Banadir Regional Court ordered the release of journalist Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul, who had been detained for 56 days.<sup>59</sup> The Court declared him innocent, ruling his detention unlawful in response to the prosecutor's request for a delay. Bulbul, who was investigating corruption within the Somali police force in relation to EU-funded training, endured physical abuse and incommunicado

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Horn Observer, "Puntland president Deni requests 45-day extension for cabinet formation," 28 January 2024, <u>https://hornobserver.com/articles/2630/Puntland-president-Deni-requests-45-day-extension-for-cabinet-formation</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Horn Observer, "Somali women MPs rally against opposition to women's participation in politics," 20 March 2024, <u>https://hornobserver.com/articles/2678/Somali-women-MPs-rally-against-opposition-to-womens-participation-in-politics</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Horn Observer, "Former Somali President Sharif warns Hassan Sheikh highlighting three main concerns" 23 March 2024, <u>https://hornobserver.com/articles/2683/Former-Somali-President-Sharif-warns-Hassan-Sheikh-highlighting-three-main-concerns</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> All Africa, "Somalia parliament passes bill allowing President appoint PM," 31 March 2024,

https://www.africanews.com/2024/03/31/somalia-parliament-passes-bill-allowing-president-appoint-pm/, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Horn Observer, "Somalia court frees detained journalist, says journalism not a crime", 12 October 2023, <u>https://hornobserver.com/articles/2492/Victory-for-Journalism-Somalia-court-frees-detained-journalist-says-journalism-not-a-crime</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

detention. His defense argued that the detention constituted retaliation for exposing police corruption. On 25 September 2023, the judge dismissed all seven charges against Bulbul, emphasising the historical misuse of an outdated Somali Penal Code against journalists.

On 16 October 2023, a senior journalist and director of Somali Cable TV, Abdifatah Moalim Nur (Qeys), lost his life in a suicide bombing near the Somali Presidential Palace,Villa Somalia, in Mogadishu.<sup>60</sup> The attack also resulted in injuries to four other individuals. Abdifatah was an active advocate against media freedom restrictions, and his death marks the first journalist fatality in Somalia this year. Somalia has consistently been ranked as one of Africa's, and the world's, deadliest countries for journalists and media workers.<sup>61</sup>

On 18 October 2023, the Attorney General of Somalia summoned and questioned Abdirahman Jeylani Mohamed, the director of Arlaadi Media Network, for 30 minutes.<sup>62</sup> Prior to this incident, Arlaadi Media Network had broadcast a report outlining allegations of enforced payments by local authorities for unspecified reasons and the community's struggle in managing the siege imposed by the Al-Shabaab group.

On 6 January 2024, Somaliland security forces violently raided MM Somali TV, assaulting journalists and staff, damaging equipment during an ongoing debate about a contentious agreement that escalated diplomatic tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia.<sup>63</sup> They blindfolded, detained, and took CEO and founder Mohamed Abdi Ilig, reporter Andar, and cameraman Ilyas Abdinasir to an undisclosed location. On 9 January 2024, authorities released the latter without filing any charges; however, at the time of writing, Ilig continues to be detained without charges.<sup>64</sup> Over the years, targeting journalists who cover sensitive topics has been a continuous trend in the Somaliland region.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Horn Observer, "TV director killed Mogadishu suicide bombing", 16 October 2023, <u>https://hornobserver.com/articles/2496/Somalia-TV-director-killed-Mogadishu-suicide-bombing</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> CPJ, "Somaliland journalist Mohamed Abdi Sheikh detained after discussing diplomatic row", <u>https://cpj.org/2024/01/somaliland-journalist-mohamed-abdi-sheikh-detained-after-discussing-diplomatic-row/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> SJS, "SJS raises concerns over interrogation of Arlaadi Media Director Abdirahman Adani by government prosecutor", 18 October 2023, <u>https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/10/18/sjs-raises-concerns-over-interrogation-of-arlaadi-media-director-abdirahman-adani-by-government-prosecutor/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> NUSOJ, "Journalists Arrested and Independent TV Raided in Violent Crackdown",

<sup>7</sup> January 2024, <u>https://www.nusoj.org/nusoj-slams-somalilands-shocking-assault-on-press-freedom-journalists-arrested-and-independent-tv-raided-in-violent-crackdown/</u>, Accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Facebook, MM Somali tv, 9 January 2024, <u>https://www.facebook.com/mmsomalitv/posts/873005968168120</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

On 7 January 2024, armed police officers targeted RTN TV reporter Abdihafid Nor Barre and cameraman Abdukadir Abukar Ali in Mogadishu.<sup>65</sup> While the journalists were covering an eviction on orders from the Banadir Regional Court chairman and conducting interviews with affected family members who asserted its illegality, an armed officer directed a gun at them during a recording, forcing the reporters to flee for safety.

In January 2024, the Lower House Office of Communications and Media Relations issued a notification via WhatsApp to independent media, instructing them to obtain accreditation letters from the Ministry of Information by 10 January 2024 in order to cover parliamentary proceedings.<sup>66</sup>

In January 2024 police detained Mohamed Abdi Ilig alongside two colleagues, reporter Mohamed Abdi Abdullahi (known as Andar) and cameraman Ilyaas Abdinasir, after he moderated an X (formerly Twitter) discussion on the Somaliland-Ethiopia memorandum of understanding (MOU), hosted by MM Somali TV.<sup>67</sup> On 9 January 2024, the two were released without charges. Subsequently, on 30 January 2024, Ilig appeared before the Maroodi Jeex Regional Court in Hargeisa, where his detention was extended for an additional seven days without legal representation. However, on 20 February 2024, a court in Hargeisa declared Ilig innocent and released him after 43 days of imprisonment.<sup>68</sup>

On 18 January 2024, Journalist Shukri Aden Hussein highlighted the severe risks faced by Somalia's frontline women journalists, including threats from al-Shabab militants. She described instances of intimidation, reporting restrictions, and other challenges encountered by female journalists.<sup>69</sup>

On 19 February 2024, authorities at Garowe airport deported journalist Jamal Osman, a Somali freelancer for UK media outlets, for undisclosed reasons. Despite inquiries, officials have not disclosed details about his case, prompting assumptions that his journalistic work may have led to his arrest.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Horn Observer, "SJS condemns attacks on media and journalists",

https://hornobserver.com/articles/2602/SJS-condemns-attacks-on-media-and-journalists-calls-for-respect-for-freedom-of-press, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> SJS, "Somaliland should free founder of MM Somali TV; Somalia parliament must give access to all media," 31 January 2024, <u>https://sjsyndicate.org/2024/01/31/somaliland-should-free-founder-of-mm-somali-tv-somalia-parliament-must-give-access-to-all-media/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Voice Of America, "Somalia's Frontline Women Journalists Face Multiple Risks."

https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-s-frontline-women-journalists-face-multiple-risks/7445415.html. <sup>70</sup>Garowe online, "puntland expels journalist over previous al-shabaab reports," 19 February 2024, https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-puntland-expels-journalist-over-previous-al-shabaab-reports, accessed on 6 April 2024.

On 13 March 2024, a security guard fatally shot Journalist Abdikarin Ahmed Bulhan, a reporter for Somali National Television (SNTV), at his workplace in the Abudwak district of Somalia for unknown reasons.<sup>71</sup> Prior to the shooting, Abdikarin had allegedly engaged in an argument with the guard. Ahmed Bulhan's tragic death marks the first journalist killed in Somalia in 2024.

On 14 March 2024, the Council of Ministers appointed members to the Somali Media Council without consulting media organisations.<sup>72</sup> The inclusion of a former senator among the appointees heightened concerns about political interference and cast doubt on the Council's independence, as journalists fear it suggests potential state control over the media.

On 1 April 2024, local police threatened and detained Mohamud Abdirashid Abdi, a freelancer for Nairobi-based Radio Ergo, for exposing a police shooting of two *tuk tuk* drivers over unpaid 'fees' in a Facebook post.<sup>73</sup> His family's access has been denied, and reports suggest was beaten in custody.<sup>74</sup>

#### South Sudan

#### **General situation**

As South Sudan awaits its first general elections, scheduled for December 2024, the government persistently suppresses journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens expressing dissent through intimidation, surveillance, threats, and violence.<sup>75</sup> This threatens the democratic and civic space, according to a UN report. The report, entitled "Entrenched Repression," underscores that these actions hinder the free exchange of ideas crucial for credible elections, potentially undermining their legitimacy and causing a climate of fear and censorship.<sup>76</sup> The report emphasises numerous instances of statesponsored human rights violations, including through the the invasive surveillance of civil society activities and journalists by the NSS.

14 March 2024, <u>https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/africa/article/somalia-journalist-shot-and-killed-by-security-guard-in-the-newsroom</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> IFJ, "Journalist shot and killed by security guard in the newsroom,"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> IFJ, "Somalia: Unlawful appointment of Media Council threatens press freedom,"

<sup>18</sup> March 2024, <u>https://www.ifj.org/es/sala-de-prensa/noticias/detalle/category/africa/article/somalia-unlawful-appointment-of-media-council-threatens-press-freedom</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Horn Observer, "Free journalist Mohamud Abdirashid Abdi arbitrarily detained in Luuq district, Gedo," 5 April 2024, <u>https://hornobserver.com/articles/2697/SJS-Free-journalist-Mohamud-Abdirashid-Abdi-arbitrarily-detained-in-Luuq-district-Gedo,accessed</u> on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> The Guardian, "South Sudan 'attacking' journalists and activists who criticise the state", <u>https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/06/south-sudan-attacking-journalists-and-activists-who-criticise-the-state</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> OHCHR, "Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan",

https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-h-south-sudan/index, accessed on 6 April 2024.

A delegation from the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS), led by Chairperson Yasmin Sooka, visited South Sudan from February 12 to 16, 2024.<sup>77</sup> During their visit, the CHRSS engaged with government officials, civil society, and survivors of human rights violations to assess the human rights situation. From its findings, the UN Commission highlighted widespread abuses by armed forces and state institutions, urged political leaders to implement the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement and address root causes of violations to safeguard human rights ahead of elections.<sup>78</sup>

#### Freedom of association

On 5 October 2023, Biar Ajak Marol, Executive Director of Junubin Chronicles, a youthled NGO that addresses societal issues through edutainment (education and entertainment), disappeared in Juba under mysterious circumstances.<sup>79</sup> Witnesses, speaking anonymously, reported Biar's abduction by operatives from the NSS. Jacob Bil Kur, his co-founder, arranged a press conference with Sudan's Post to garner public support in finding Biar, but authorities abruptly halted it. Seven youth activists linked to his organization were detained in connection to his disappearance. On 31 January 2024, their lawyer confirmed the release of four activists on bail.<sup>80</sup>

#### Freedom of opinion and expression

On 21 January 2024, South Sudan acknowledged its removal of news articles it deems "hateful."<sup>81</sup> While some view the government's actions as necessary for curbing potentially incendiary content, others, including international observers and media rights advocates, express concerns about the suppression of free speech. They emphasize the effect on blocking access to critical information and stifling public debate.

#### Sudan

#### **General situation**

<sup>77</sup> Radio Tamjuz, "UN human rights experts set for South Sudan visit",

<sup>8</sup> February 2024, <u>https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/un-human-rights-experts-set-for-south-sudan-visit</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> OHCHR, "UN report highlights risk of more and gross human rights violations if South Sudan's conflict drivers remain unaddressed", 01 March 2024, <u>https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-report-highlights-risk-more-and-gross-human-rights-violations-if-south#main-content</u>, Accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Sudans post, "NSS refuses to allow press conference on disappearance of activist Biar Ajak", 27 October 2024,

https://www.sudanspost.com/nss-refuses-to-allow-press-conference-on-disappearance-of-activist-biarajak/, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Radio Tamjuz, "our youth activists detained for disappearance of their boss released on bail ",31 January 2024, <u>https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/four-youth-activists-detained-fordisappearance-of-their-boss-released-on-bail</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> OWP, "South Sudan's Battle with Censorship: Removing "Hateful" News Articles", <u>https://theowp.org/south-sudans-battle-with-censorship-removing-hateful-news-articles/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

Sudan continues to face a dire human rights and humanitarian situation. The country has endured over a year of conflict between the SAF and the paramilitary RSF.<sup>82</sup> This conflict has led to suffering, with over 12,190 lives lost and millions displaced. Approximately 25 million people now rely on humanitarian aid, while nearly 18 million face severe food insecurity.

On 11 December 2023, Sudanese army soldiers killed two people and injured seven others, including three staff members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who were evacuating vulnerable civilians in an ICRC humanitarian convoy.<sup>83</sup> In response, the SAF expressed regret for the incident and attributed the attack to the failure of the "Red Cross members to adhere to the agreed-upon coordination points."<sup>84</sup>

On 8 January 2024, the governor of the River Nile State, Mohamed Al-Badawi, enacted a ban on the operations of the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) and the local Resistance Committees.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, he dissolved all service committees within the state's urban and rural areas and appointed new bodies comprised of military veterans. Similarly, on 23 January 2024, the acting Minister of Federal Governance in Port Sudan declared a ban on previously formed civil society groups prohibiting them from aiding those in need, alleging collaboration with the RSF.<sup>86</sup>

On 13 February 2024, the RSF allegedly targeted and killed two civilians in Wad Al-Balila village, with four more deaths reported the following day amidst nationwide communication and internet outages.<sup>87</sup> The attacks were allegedly driven by intentions of looting and theft. Similarly, on 20 February 2024, Bahri Emergency Room, a group that provides meals in Khartoum, reported a growing crisis in Sudan due to internet outage, that disrupted their operations, resulting in civilian deaths.<sup>88</sup>

#### **Freedom of association**

https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/two-killed-in-attack-on-red-cross-convoy-insudan-capital, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>88</sup>Sudan Tribune, "Internet outage halts food aid, leading to deaths in Khartoum," 20 February 2024, <u>https://sudantribune.com/article282442/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> UN, <u>https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148791</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.
83 Dabanga Sudan, "two killed in attack on Red Cross convoy in Sudan capital,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Radio Tamjuz, "Nile River governor expels pro-democracy group leaders," 1 January 2024, <u>https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/nile-river-governor-expels-pro-democracy-group-leaders</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Relief web, "Sudan gov't cracks down on civil society groups in the entire country,"<u>https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-govt-cracks-down-civil-society-groups-entire-country</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Sudan Tribune, "Sudanese activists report civilian deaths in clashes with RSF," 13 February 2024, <u>https://sudantribune.com/article282257/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

On 25 December 2023, SAF military intelligence detained multiple volunteers providing meals to displaced individuals without justification, causing the suspension of aid services in Sennar state.<sup>89</sup> The volunteers endured torture, severe beatings, abuse, and food deprivation at the SAF headquarters. In a similar incident, military intelligence detained several volunteers at the Lammat Kheir initiative tent but later released three of them.<sup>90</sup>

On 20 January 2024, the SAF Military Intelligence (MI) Unit arbitrarily arrested and tortured seven HRDs.<sup>91</sup> In a similar incident on 14 January 2024, the MI Unit in Al-Damazin detained four activists from the local Resistance Committees.<sup>92</sup> Despite releasing them later the same day, the activists faced threats and pressure to support the SAF in recruitment efforts against the RSF.

On 26 January 2024, RSF allegedly detained a Sudanese Congress Party member El Sadig Bur'i from his home for unknown reasons.<sup>93</sup>

# Freedom of opinion and expression

In October 2023, an RSF vehicle fatally struck journalist Halima Idris, a reporter for an online news outlet Sudan Bukra while she was reporting on a street in Omdurman.<sup>94</sup> Prior to this incident, the journalist had been reporting on the war and the patriotic efforts of young people in the Ombadda emergency rooms and hospitals.

On 6 January 2024, military intelligence officers arrested journalist Yasir Jubara in the Blue Nile and detained him for four days in a container under inhumane conditions over accusations of affiliation with the Forces for Freedom and Change.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, on 11

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Dabanga, "SAF intelligence detains volunteers feeding Sennar displaced,"

<sup>25</sup> December 2023, <u>https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/saf-intelligence-detains-volunteers-feeding-sennar-displaced</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> "Seven human rights defenders and activists arrested, detained, and allegedly tortured by the saf military intelligence unit in the blue nile region," 20 January 2024,

https://www.acjps.org/publications/sudan-seven-human-rights-defenders-and-activists-arresteddetained-and-allegedly-tortured-by-the-saf-military-intelligence-unit-in-the-blue-nile-region, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> Dabanga, "Sudan RSF detain a journalist and a politician in El Gezira,"

<sup>26</sup> January 2024, <u>https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-rsf-detain-a-journalist-and-a-politician-in-wad-madani</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Dabanga, "Sudan Bukra and CPJ call for investigation into the death of journalist Halima Idris,"

https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-bukra-and-cpj-call-for-investigation-intothe-death-of-journalist-halima-idris, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Development Diaries, "Journalists, Other Civilians Need Protection." 26 January 2024, <u>https://developmentdiaries.com/sudan-journalists-other-civilians-need-protection/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

January 2024, army officers took Ahmed Arabi, a presenter for Nile Blue TV for investigations. They later declared him dead. $^{96}$ 

On 22 January 2024, members of RSF arrested Haisam Dafallah, the editor-in-chief of El Midan newspaper and his brother Omer Dafallah, searched their residence, and confiscated their cell phones for unknown reasons.<sup>97</sup>

On 26 January 2024, the RSF unlawfully detained photographer Khaled El Hado as he traveled from El Hosh village to Wad Madani without justification prompting concerns about his well-being from his family and colleagues.<sup>98</sup>

In January, RSF soldiers arrested freelance journalist Ogail Ahmed Naime from his home in Khartoum for unknown reasons. The whereabouts of his detention remains undisclosed.<sup>99</sup>

In January, a social media post accused Shuhdi Nader, a correspondent for Al Arabiya and Al Hadath TV, of collaborating with the RSF.<sup>100</sup> Prior to this, he reported on areas affected by Sudanese Air Force bombings. In a similar incident, a group affiliated with the RSF attacked and injured Ahmed Juma and trespassed on the property of Basha'ir El Nil TV channel, where he serves as office manager.<sup>101</sup>

On 7 February 2024, Sudan experienced a total internet shutdown for unknown reasons, following extensive disruptions at the end of January 2024.<sup>102</sup>

On 1 March 2024, armed soldiers fatally shot journalist Khalid Balal, who was the media director at the Sudanese government's Supreme Council for Media and Culture.<sup>103</sup> Despite efforts, the perpetrators remain unidentified, and requests for comment from the SAF and RSF are unanswered.

<sup>98</sup> Dabanga, "Sudan RSF detain a journalist and a politician in El Gezira," 26 January 2024, <u>https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-rsf-detain-a-journalist-and-a-politician-in-wad-madani</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> CPJ, "CPJ calls for immediate release of Sudanese journalist Haitham Dafallah and his brother," 22 January 2024, <u>https://cpj.org/2024/01/cpj-calls-for-immediate-release-of-sudanese-journalist-haitham-dafallah-and-his-brother/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> CPJ, "CPJ calls for immediate release of Sudanese journalist Haitham Dafallah and his brother," 22 January 2024, <u>https://cpj.org/2024/01/cpj-calls-for-immediate-release-of-sudanese-journalist-haitham-dafallah-and-his-brother/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Dabanga, "Sudanese Journalists Network condemns violence against reporters," 24 January 2024, <u>https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudanese-journalists-network-condemns-violence-against-reporters</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Ibid <sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> IDIA

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> CPJ, CPJ condemns killing of Sudanese journalist Khalid Balal in Darfur

<sup>6</sup> March 2024, <u>https://cpj.org/2024/03/cpj-condemns-killing-of-sudanese-journalist-khalid-balal-in-darfur/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

On 12 March 2024, the SAF seized control of the premises of the national radio and television, previously under the control of the RSF.<sup>104</sup> In response, journalists raised concerns about the conversion of the area into a detention center and the potential loss of archives.<sup>105</sup>

## Tanzania

#### **General situation**

In December 2023, the European Parliament adopted a resolution urging an end of forced evictions of Maasai communities in the Ngorongoro district.<sup>106</sup> The resolution further mandates the European Commission to evaluate how EU-funded programs in Tanzania address human rights, biodiversity loss, and climate change.

On 24 January 2024, hundreds of Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) supporters protested, demanding greater political liberalization ahead of the 2025 elections.<sup>107</sup> They called for electoral law changes to prevent presidential appointments to the electoral commission. This marks Tanzania's first major demonstration in seven years since President Samia Suluhu Hassan lifted the ban on political rallies and meetings in 2023.<sup>108</sup>

On 30 March 2024, unknown gunmen attempted to assassinate Tanzanian politician Christopher Ole Sendeka, a Member of Parliament for Simanjiro, by shooting at his car with bullets.<sup>109</sup> Investigations continue into the incident, although the perpetrators are yet to be identified. This marks the second assassination attempt on a politician in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup>Dabanga, "Sudan army takes control of Radio and Television Corporation in Omdurman,"

https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-army-takes-control-of-radio-and-televisioncorporation-in-omdurman, accessed on 6 April 2024.

 $<sup>^{105}</sup>$  Dabanga, "Fighting threatens 100-year-old media archives"

<sup>11</sup> February 2024, <u>https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-journalists-fighting-threatens-100-year-old-media-archives</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Maryknollogc "Maasai Land Rights Defended by EU," January 2024,

https://maryknollogc.org/resources/newsnotes/tanzania-maasai-land-rights-defended-eu, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Aljazeera, "Thousands protest in Tanzania as opposition seeks amended electoral reforms", <u>https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/24/thousands-protest-in-tanzania-as-opposition-seeks-amended-electoral-reforms</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> CIVICUS Monitor, Reprieve for Maasai protestors, mps mull tougher anti-lgbtqi+ law, 28 April 2023, <u>https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/reprieve-for-maasai-protestors-mps-mull-tougher-anti-lgbtqi-law/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> The Citizen, "Tanzanian politician survives assassination attempt after gunmen spray bullets into his car",30 March 2024, <u>https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/tanzanian-politician-survives-assassination-attempt-after-gunmen-spray-bullets-into-his-car-4573262</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

Tanzania, following the political motivated attack in 2017 when opposition member Tundu Lissu was shot 16 times. $^{110}$ 

#### Freedom of association

On 12 March 2024, plain clothes officers at Bandarini police post arrested activist Deusdedith Soka, a member of the opposition CHADEMA party, accusing him of publishing 'false information,' on X formerly known as twitter, and held him for several hours before releasing him on bail.<sup>111</sup>

On 9 March 2024, authorities summoned nine Project Affected Persons (PAPs), regarding their opposition to the EACOP project.<sup>112</sup> On 11 March, officials interrogated them, confiscated their phones, and ordered them to return to the police station after two days. The PAPs complied and were further instructed to return on 28 March, with no charges filed against them as of today.

# Freedom of opinion and expression

On 15 October 2023, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) implemented a ban on using VPN without obtaining a permit. imposing severe consequences for non-compliance: individuals may face a fine of \$2000 or a minimum prison sentence of 12 months.<sup>113</sup> TCRA justified its decision by citing Regulation 16(2) of the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations of 2020, aiming to prevent Tanzanians from accessing content deemed illegal.

In October 2023, during a side event in Tanzania on 'challenges of media freedom and the safety of journalists' the Director of Al Jazeera Centre for Public Liberties and Human Rights highlighted instances of targeted violence against journalists from the Al Jazeera Media Network and urged international support to ensure journalists' safety.<sup>114</sup> Around 30 participants from various media organizations, including Article 19, International Press Institute, Namibia Media Trust, Journalists Workers Union of Tanzania, Kenya Union of Journalists, Pan-African Lawyers Union, and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, convened. The event delved into themes such as online

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Chanzo, "two arrested for publishing false information about government officials on social media/," 14 March 2024, <u>https://thechanzo.com/2024/03/14/two-arrested-for-publishing-false-information-about-govt-officials-on-social-media/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Inclusivedevelopment "EACOP Project-Affected People and Activists Face Ongoing Intimidation in Tanzania," 20 March 2024, <u>https://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/wp-</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;u>content/uploads/2024/03/StopEACOP-Statement-on-the-Interrogation-Intimidation-of-Tanzanian-PAPs-</u><u>1.pdf</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> International Federation of journalists, "Tanzania Imposes Ban On VPN Usage Without A Permit," 15 October 2023, <u>https://cioafrica.co/tanzania-imposes-ban-on-vpn-usage-without-a-permit/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> International Federation of journalists, "ACPLHR, FAJ hold side event on 'challenges of media freedom and the safety of journalists," 20 October 2023, <u>https://www.ifj.org/media-</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;u>centre/news/detail/category/africa/article/tanzania-acplhr-faj-hold-side-event-on-challenges-of-media-freedom-and-the-safety-of-journalists</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

harassment of female journalists, legal challenges to journalism, and governmental obligations to uphold democracy and the rule of law.

On 7 February 2024, a District Commissioner Simon Simalenga expelled journalists from a crucial meeting, despite their invitation by district officials, citing meeting guidelines that prohibited the participation of uninvited guests.<sup>115</sup> However, specific details of these guidelines were not provided prompting journalists Sitta Tuma and Samirah Yusuph, to question the necessity of the decision and its impact on their work.

On 16 February 2023, the "*Sauti za Waandishi*" survey of Tanzanian media practitioners revealed significant challenges of Tanzanian journalists. The study emphasized safety concerns, freedom limitations, and declining well-being.<sup>116</sup> Among women journalists, 77% reported experiencing violence during their professional endeavors. Within this group, 27% face abuse such as sexual harassment and bribery from news sources, with 59% of these instances occurring in newsrooms.

#### Uganda

#### **General situation**

In 2023, Human Rights Watch in a report condemned the Ugandan government's crackdown on anti-fossil fuel activists and environmental defenders.<sup>117</sup> The report documented harassment, threats, and arbitrary arrests of lawful protesters expressing concerns over the climate impact of the EACOP. Additionally, it detailed violations in EACOP's land acquisition process, notably inadequate compensation for affected landowners.<sup>118</sup>

On 8 February 2024, Mary Lawlor, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, emphasized the pattern of violence, arbitrary arrests, and detention targeting EHRDs who peacefully advocate for environmental protection and climate action.<sup>119</sup> She called on Ugandan authorities to "change course" in their treatment of activists.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> The chanzo, "Bariadi DC Simon Simaenga criticisedafter kicking out journalists out of key meeting," 20 February 2024, <u>https://thechanzo.com/2024/02/20/bariadi-dc-simon-simalenga-criticised-after-kicking-journalists-out-of-key-meeting/</u>, accessed on on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> The chanzo, "Study paints gloomy picture for Tanzania's journalists," 16 February 2024, <u>https://thechanzo.com/2024/02/16/study-paints-gloomy-picture-for-tanzanias-journalists/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Ugandan Authorities Should Drop Charges Against Environmental Activists", 11 March 2024, <u>https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/11/ugandan-authorities-should-drop-charges-against-environmental-activists</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> Twitter, "UN Special Rapporteur HRDs," 8 February 2024,

https://twitter.com/MaryLawlorhrds/status/1755560227997438065?s=20, accessed on on 6 April 2024.

On 3 April 2024, Uganda's Constitutional Court upheld most provisions of the controversial 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, despite global criticism.<sup>120</sup> The law, passed in 2023, retains measures like the death penalty in certain cases. However, the court invalidated sections of the law related to healthcare access and renting premises to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and others (LGBT+) individuals. The court rejected challenges to the law's constitutionality, asserting it mirrors parliamentary opinion, and dismissed claims of financial implications. Additionally, the judges ruled that challengers failed to demonstrate the law's negative financial effects or breaches in parliamentary procedures during its passing.

#### Freedom of association

On 3 January 2024, two assailants on a motorcycle stabbed LGBT+ activist Steven Kabuye who leads the advocacy group Colored Voice Truth to LGBTQ, in his in the right arm and stomach.<sup>121</sup> Prior to this, he had received death threats and relocated to Kenya in March 2023 following an attack on one of the group's members.

In March, Ugandan authorities-initiated trials against eleven students for their activism opposing the EACOP, a project predominantly supported by TotalEnergies. They were accused of the colonial-era "common nuisance" offense.<sup>122</sup>

On 21 March 2024, court rejected a petition from Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), an organisation advocating for the rights of LGBT+ individuals, to register its name.<sup>123</sup> The court asserted that the organisation's name is against the "public interest." This marked a decade-long legal battle since SMUG's initial petition. The organisation first sought registration nearly ten years ago after facing refusal from the government registrar in 2015. This implies that SMUG, which failed to register with the NGO Bureau, remains unable to legally operate.

#### Freedom of peaceful assembly

In January 2024, Ugandan police surrounded the residence of opposition leader Kyagulanyi Sentamu, also known as Bobi Wine, and placed him under house arrest ahead

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Court Upholds Anti-Homosexuality Act," 4 April 2024,

https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/04/uganda-court-upholds-anti-homosexuality-act, accessed on on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> KHRC, "Attack on LGBTQ activist Kabuye underscores urgency to repeal Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act," 3 January 2024, <u>https://khrc.or.ke/press-release/attack-on-lgbtq-activist-kabuye-underscores-urgency-to-repeal-ugandas-anti-homosexuality-act/</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Ugandan Authorities Should Drop Charges Against Environmental Activists," 11 March 2024, <u>https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/11/ugandan-authorities-should-drop-charges-against-environmental-activists</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Ugandan Appeals Court Shutters LGBT Rights Group",

<sup>21</sup> March 2024, <u>https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/21/ugandan-appeals-court-shutters-lgbt-rights-group</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

of planned protests over road conditions coinciding with global summits.<sup>124</sup> In a similar incident, authorities placed Dr. Kizza Besigye, the former presidential candidate from the Forum for Democratic Change opposition party, under house arrest, citing preventive measures in accordance with police mandate on the same day.<sup>125</sup> The police spokesman confirmed the security deployment at both locations, citing the need to avoid instigating unlawful assemblies and political demonstrations.<sup>126</sup>

## Freedom of opinion and expression

On 5 October 2023, law enforcement officers arrested 14 journalists, including Joseph Balikuddembe, Julius Kitone, and Isano Francis, as they covered the return of National Unity Platform (NUP) President Bobi Wine, to Uganda.<sup>127</sup> Before his return, Bobi Wine rallied for anti-government protests called the "One Million March".<sup>128</sup> The officers physically assaulted the journalists, confiscated their equipment, and transported them to Entebbe Police Station. One of the journalists Joseph Balikuddembe sustained head and eye injuries during the incident.

On 20 March 2024, amidst the 'Uganda Parliament Exhibition,' an online campaign exposing rampant corruption and abuse of power within Parliament of Uganda, Jim Spire, one of the initiators of the campaign, received death threats and surveillance.<sup>129</sup> Parliament allegedly sought access to his communication records through the Uganda Communication Commission. In the past, Spire has led various social media campaigns, shedding light on critical issues such as infrastructure deficiencies, healthcare shortcomings, civil society concerns, and abuse of office within Parliament.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Voice Of America, "Ugandan Opposition Leaders Says He's Under House Arrest",

<sup>18</sup> January 2024, <u>https://www.voaafrica.com/a/ugandan-opposition-leaders-say-s-he-s-under-house-arrest/7446045.html</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> Ibid

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> HRNJ, "Ugandan Security assaults and arrests several journalists while covering the return of NUP President Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu," <u>https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=9825</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.
 <sup>128</sup> Monitor, "NUP insists on Bobi welcome march despite police warning,"

<sup>5</sup> October 2023, <u>https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/nup-insists-on-bobi-welcome-march-despite-police-warning-4390326</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Nile Post, "Makerere lecturers condemn threats on Spire's life, demand IGP's action",
 20 March 2024, <u>https://nilepost.co.ug/featured/192657/makerere-lecturers-condemn-threats-on-spires-life-demand-igps-action</u>, accessed on 6 April 2024.