



# **DEFENDDEFENDERS**

**East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project**

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

**OBSERVER STATUS: 359**

**OCTOBER 2024- MAY 2025**

**REPORT SUBMITTED AHEAD OF THE 83<sup>rd</sup> ORDINARY SESSION OF THE  
AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

**BANJUL, THE GAMBIA,  
MAY 2025**

**DefendDefenders' Bi-Annual Report to the ACHPR**

DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) Arie  
Towers | Plot 16 | Mackinnon Road

Nakasero | P.O. Box 70356 | Kampala | Uganda | Phone: +256 200 760 700 | +256 200  
760 704

Email: [info@defenddefenders.org](mailto:info@defenddefenders.org) Web: [www.defenddefenders.org](http://www.defenddefenders.org)

Twitter: @defenddefenders Facebook: defenddefenders Instagram: defenddefenders

### **Contacts**

Hassan Shire (Executive Director)

[hassans@defenddefenders.org](mailto:hassans@defenddefenders.org)

+256 772 753 753

Estella Kansiime (Advocacy, Research, and Communications Manager)

[estellak@defenddefenders.org](mailto:estellak@defenddefenders.org)

+256 200 760 707

## Executive Summary

DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) welcomes the opportunity offered by the 83<sup>rd</sup> ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (hereafter "the Commission") to highlight the most pressing human rights issues in the East and Horn of Africa sub-region for the period October 2024 to May 2025.

During the reporting period, the East and Horn of Africa region experienced escalating conflict, mounting political tensions, and a continued assault on civic space. Ongoing armed conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia resulted in widespread human rights violations, mass displacement, and deepening humanitarian crises. In the lead-up to elections in Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda, authorities intensified repression of political opposition. Opposition figures were surveilled, harassed, and in some cases charged with treason—widely viewed as a politically motivated tactic to silence dissent. Across the region, there was a disturbing increase in enforced disappearances, unlawful killings, and other patterns of repression targeting critics of the government. The broader trend of shrinking civic space continued, marked by sustained attacks on press freedom and civil society. Governments across the region used legal and extrajudicial means to restrict fundamental freedoms, including arrests of journalists, media shutdowns, and curbs on peaceful assembly. The report underscores a pervasive and coordinated effort to stifle dissent and weaken democratic participation ahead of key electoral processes.

### Burundi

Burundi's human rights situation continues to deteriorate amid widespread impunity, with the country entering a tense electoral period ahead of the 2025 legislative and 2027 presidential elections. Authorities have intensified repression, with reports of extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Fundamental freedoms remain severely restricted, including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, assembly, and association. Hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric, including from top political figures, have surged, fueling tensions. Civic space faces mounting pressure, with ongoing attacks on journalists and political opposition members. The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) has disqualified opposition candidates from the Burundi Bwa Bose coalition. The CNDD-FDD ruling party's youth militia, the *Imbonerakure*, continues to target, assault, detain, and intimidate opposition members. The escalation of rights violations in this pre-election period raises concerns of further unrest, echoing patterns of violence from past election cycles.

### Djibouti

Djibouti's civic space is severely restricted, and is currently classified as "*closed*" by the Civicus Monitor. This means there are significant restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association, and access to information, particularly for civil society organisations (CSOs) and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). The democratic and civic space remains completely closed, with public gatherings being a rare occurrence and online spaces, including Facebook, being the only relatively open spaces to express and share views critical of the authorities.

### Eritrea

Eritrea remains under the authoritarian rule of President Isaias Afwerki, with civic space among the most restricted globally. The government continues to suppress fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, opinion, and movement. In its 2024 report, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked Eritrea as the largest jailer of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa. Amid rising regional tensions, the authorities have intensified internal control measures, issuing directives for mass military mobilisation and restricting the right to leave the country for citizens under 50. On 31 December 2024, Eritrea completed its second and last three-year term as a member of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC), with no tangible improvements in its human rights record. Eritrean authorities continue to refuse to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea.

### **Ethiopia**

The human rights situation in Ethiopia remains grave, with government forces, militias, and armed groups committing widespread abuses, particularly in the Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray regions. In October 2023, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) appointed by the HRC reported serious violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence, and ethnic-based attacks, committed in a context of impunity. Unfortunately, the ICHREE's mandate was not renewed, which left a vacuum and deprived the HRC of the opportunity to regularly receive reports on, and address, the human rights situation in Ethiopia. In Amhara, fighting between federal forces and Fano militias has led to mass arrests of ethnic Amharas, civilian deaths, and the destruction of healthcare facilities, amounting to possible war crimes. Oromia and Tigray remain unstable. Civic space continues to shrink amid smear campaigns, harassment, and the forced exile of HRDs and journalists. Although the suspension of key rights organisations was lifted in March 2025, restrictions on freedom of expression and association persist. Accountability remains elusive, with little progress on the transitional justice process or the implementation of the 2022 Pretoria Agreement. Meanwhile, tensions with Eritrea are rising, raising fears of renewed regional conflict.

### **Kenya**

Kenya's human rights situation deteriorated significantly over the past year. In December 2024, CIVICUS downgraded the country's civic space rating from "*Obstructed*" to "*Repressed*", following a violent crackdown on anti-Finance Bill protests where police used excessive force, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries. Since June 2024, enforced disappearances and abductions targeting government critics have surged, while extrajudicial killings remain a serious concern. Journalists, HRDs, and civil society actors faced harassment and intimidation. The government also escalated efforts to control digital spaces under the guise of curbing disinformation, though these measures appear aimed at stifling dissent and restricting online political expression. Additionally, the abductions of Ugandan opposition leader Dr Kizza Besigye and Tanzanian activist Maria Sarungi Tsehai raised alarm over Kenya's role in cross-border violations. The year also recorded the country's highest number of femicides, exposing deep-rooted gender-based violence (GBV).

### **Rwanda**

Rwanda's human rights record remains concerning. The government continues to suppress dissent and severely restrict civic space. Regionally, Rwanda's escalating

tensions with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have fueled a worsening security and humanitarian crisis. The UN General Assembly, the African Union (AU), and foreign partners including France, Belgium, Germany, the United States, Canada, and the European Union have condemned the situation and urged restraint, dialogue, and de-escalation. In response to Rwanda's alleged involvement in the conflict, international actors have imposed targeted sanctions on Rwandan individuals and entities and suspended aspects of economic and trade cooperation. The diplomatic fallout with Belgium, historically a key bilateral partner and major donor to Rwandan civil society, poses a significant threat to the financial sustainability of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), compounding the already shrinking civic space and placing further pressure on HRDs.

### **Somalia (together with Somaliland)**

Somalia faces a complex humanitarian crisis worsened by prolonged drought, conflict, and political instability. On 10 March 2025, a bomb attack targeting President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud highlighted ongoing insecurity and the threat from non-state armed group, Al-Shabaab. The right to freedom of opinion and expression remains severely limited as a result of actions by both state (including the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA)) and non-state actors. Somalia continues to be one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Journalists face arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and violence at the hands of both security forces and armed groups. There is an increasing trend of police officers detaining journalists, deleting their footage, and obstructing their work, particularly during coverage of protests or security operations. In a further restriction, Minister of Information Daud Aweys banned reporting on security incidents in Mogadishu, deepening censorship and limiting public access to information. In Somaliland, the recent presidential election saw Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, also known as "Irro," elected to office in November 2024. While his campaign included firm commitments to protect freedom of expression, the arrest of journalist Shafi'i Abdi Mohamed in early 2025 raises concerns.

### **South Sudan**

South Sudan is on the verge of renewed large-scale conflict, with heavy fighting in Upper Nile and Western Equatoria states and rising political tensions in Juba threatening to unravel the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The government's decision to extend the transitional period and delay the country's first national elections to at least December 2026 has further eroded public trust. The National Security Service (NSS) continues to arbitrarily detain dozens of real or perceived government critics and civil society actors, despite the recent release of 16 detainees. The 16 detainees included nine military personnel from various organised forces and seven civilians, among them activists Morris Mabior Awikjok Bak and Michael Wetnhialic. Authorities briefly imposed a blanket ban on social media, violating rights to freedom of expression, information, association, and peaceful assembly. Widespread human rights abuses persist, including sexual violence, ethnically motivated attacks, extrajudicial killings, and economic exploitation, fueled by deep-rooted impunity amid worsening insecurity, displacement, and humanitarian crises.

### **Sudan**

Two years into the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Sudan remains engulfed in a devastating human rights and

humanitarian crisis. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the violence, with repeated attacks on populated areas, health facilities, schools, and internally displaced person (IDP) camps. Widespread conflict-related sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and ethnically targeted killings have been reported, while civic space has collapsed under a surge of attacks on journalists and HRDs. At least 12 journalists have been killed, and dozens arbitrarily detained. The conflict has triggered the world's largest displacement crisis, with approximately 30.4 million people, including 16 million children, now requiring humanitarian assistance. With famine-like conditions in multiple regions and access to aid severely restricted, the destruction of health infrastructure and disruption of essential services have further intensified the suffering. As the SAF regains control of Khartoum and the RSF consolidates power in Darfur, the risk of prolonged violence remains high.

### **Tanzania**

In the reporting period, Tanzania faced significant human rights challenges ahead of the 2025 elections. The political space narrowed further as security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained opposition figures, with alarming reports of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of political activists during campaign rallies. In a significant blow to democratic participation, the Independent National Elections Commission (INEC) disqualified the main opposition party, *Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo* (CHADEMA), from contesting the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, citing procedural technicalities related to a code of conduct agreement. CHADEMA had previously announced its intention to boycott the polls without meaningful electoral reforms and refused to attend the signing ceremony, calling the electoral process fundamentally flawed. The party's disqualification and the arrest and filing of a treason case against its leader, Tundu Lissu, add to growing concerns over the erosion of democratic institutions and electoral integrity in the country. The government continues to restrict freedom of expression, with individuals facing censorship, arrests, and prosecution under the Cybercrimes Act for publicly criticising state actions. Social media platforms are scrutinised, with selective blocking and monitoring reported during politically sensitive periods.

### **Uganda**

Uganda experienced escalating human rights violations marked by a systematic crackdown on journalists, environmental HRDs, and political opposition. Security forces repeatedly targeted media professionals reporting on electoral processes, subjecting them to beatings, arbitrary detention, and destruction of their equipment in an apparent effort to suppress independent coverage and stifle public access to information. These targeted assaults represent an obvious attempt to intimidate the press and violate Uganda's obligations under international human rights law, including the right to freedom of expression. Authorities also intensified pressure on political opposition figures and supporters through abductions, raids, and surveillance, with opposition parties denouncing these acts as calculated violations of the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Environmental activists, especially those protesting the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project, continued to face arrests and intimidation, further shrinking civic space and silencing voices critical of harmful development projects.

## Recommendations

- Urge all states parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to protect HRDs, by strictly adhering to the provisions of the Charter and other international and regional instruments to which they are parties, as well as the United Nations Declaration on HRDs.
- Call on governments to end the excessive use of force, including tear gas, bullets, and arrests, during peaceful protests and ensure law enforcement officers adhere to international standards on the use of force and firearms, to ensure the safety and rights of demonstrators.
- Urge all countries to strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms to address human rights violations, foster a culture where perpetrators are held accountable for their actions especially in election processes.
- Urge all governments to cease the intimidation and harassment of opposition figures, allow them to freely express their views and participate in political processes without fear of reprisal.
- Call on the governments of Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda to immediately end abductions, torture, and extrajudicial killings by security and intelligence agencies, and to ensure independent investigations, prosecution of perpetrators, and access to justice and reparations for victims and their families.
- Call on the Ethiopian government to end all restrictions on civil society organisations, including surveillance, harassment and to ensure these organisations can operate freely.
- Urge all countries to protect freedom of expression, end the arrests and intimidation of journalists and HRDs, enact laws that guarantee their rights to report and advocate freely to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Call on the government of Somalia to uphold press freedom by allowing journalists to report freely and safely on issues of insecurity, conflict, and governance, and to end the harassment, arbitrary arrests, and censorship of media professionals in line with regional and international human rights standards.
- Call on the government of Tanzania to respect the rights of indigenous populations in Ngorongoro, end the forced relocation of Maasai communities and restore their access to essential services and cultural sites.
- Call on all parties to the conflict in Sudan to end the long-standing conflict.
- Urge all parties to the conflict in Sudan to grant immediate and unhindered access to humanitarian aid across the country, especially in conflict-affected areas, to address the urgent needs of millions facing hunger and impending famine.
- Call on the Joint Fact-Finding Mission into the human rights situation in Sudan established as per ACHPR Resolution 590 to ensure the complementarity of its efforts with those of other actors, in particular the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Fact-Finding Mission established by the UN Human Rights Council, and other appropriate regional and international entities.
- Call on the government of Eritrea and Djibouti to ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society to flourish and protect the rights of all individuals to freely express their opinions.
- Call on the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea to exercise restraint, prioritise dialogue, and resolve disputes through peaceful and diplomatic means, in order to

prevent the escalation of tensions into armed conflict and to safeguard regional peace, security, and the rights of affected populations.

- Call on the government of Rwanda to engage in constructive dialogue with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and regional actors to find a peaceful resolution to ongoing conflict.

## Burundi

Burundi's human rights situation is worsening ahead of the 2025 elections, with increasing repression, political violence, and impunity. Authorities and ruling party affiliates continue to target opposition members, journalists, and civil society through arrests, attacks, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Rising hate speech and intimidation further heighten the risk of unrest and instability.

On 10 October 2024, the UN Human Rights Council (The Council) adopted Resolution A/HRC/57/22,<sup>1</sup> titled "Situation of Human Rights in Burundi," which extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Burundi. The resolution strongly condemns widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).<sup>2</sup> It also denounces the prevailing impunity and the shrinking space for free expression, civil society, political participation, and judicial independence. The Council urges Burundi, whose three-year membership runs from 2024 to 2026, to uphold international human rights standards and fully cooperate with UN mechanisms.

On 9 December 2024, DefendDefenders launched a report on the security and protection of HRDs, including journalists, during election periods in Burundi, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.<sup>3</sup> The four countries are scheduled to hold elections between 2025 and 2027. The report reveals that stifling freedom of expression, participation, association, and peaceful assembly continues to restrict HRDs from carrying out their work to call for transparent democratic processes, demand accountability, justice, respect for the rule of law and good governance in the electoral cycle. The report also makes recommendations to key stakeholders and sets out practical safety and security tips for HRDs, including journalists.

## Freedom of association

On 03 January 2025, Burundi's electoral commission disqualified candidates from the *Burundi Bwa Bose* (Burundi for All) coalition from the June 2025 legislative elections.<sup>4</sup> Although the Interior Ministry officially recognised the coalition on 17 December 2024,<sup>5</sup> CENI ruled that its candidates, who were members of parliament (MPs) in the National Assembly under the opposition *Congrès National pour la Liberté* (CNL), violated electoral laws. The rejection followed President Évariste Ndayishimiye's decree restricting

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Human Rights Council, "Situation of human rights in Burundi," 10 October 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/57/22>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>2</sup> DefendDefenders, "Burundi: UN scrutiny extended ahead of elections," 10 October 2024, <https://defenddefenders.org/burundi-un-scrutiny-extended-elections/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>3</sup> DefendDefenders, "Report launch: Rocky Ground and Shifting Sands- Human Rights Defenders working in the context of elections in East Africa- Burundi, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda," 9 December 2024, <https://defenddefenders.org/press-release-rocky-ground-shifting-sands/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>4</sup> SOS Médias Burundi, "Burundi : all candidacies of the only political coalition and the main opposition party in the next legislative elections rejected by the CENI," 3 January 2025, <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/en/2025/01/03/burundi-all-candidacies-of-the-only-political-coalition-and-the-main-opposition-party-in-the-next-legislative-elections-rejected-by-the-ceni/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>5</sup> SOS Médias Burundi, "Burundi : four opposition political parties form the very first coalition for the next elections," 18 December 2024, <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/en/2024/12/18/burundi-four-opposition-political-parties-form-the-very-first-coalition-for-the-next-elections/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

eligibility rules, requiring individuals who leave a party to wait for at least one year before running for office and extending the period to two years for party leaders.<sup>6</sup> A CNL faction condemned the rules as an attempt to exclude former presidential runner-up Agathon Rwaswa, who was ousted from his own party, CNL, in March 2024.<sup>7</sup> Rwaswa challenged the decision in court, but on 7 January 2025, the Constitutional Court upheld the disqualification.<sup>8</sup> However, the Court allowed *Burundi Bwa Bose* to resubmit its candidate lists, prompting the coalition to confirm its participation in the June elections.

On 6 January 2025, members of the ruling *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*'s (CNDD-FDD) youth league, the *Imbonerakure* militia, detained Julienne Nzobomimpa and Léonard Banzira, two members of the opposition party *Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU), in Butaha Hills, Bubanza Province.<sup>9</sup> They reportedly forced them to renounce their FRODEBU membership and join the ruling CNDD-FDD.

On 11 January 2025, four Imbonerakure reportedly attacked two CNL opposition members over their political affiliation.<sup>10</sup> Authorities have detained two suspects while the other two remain at large.

## Freedom of opinion and expression

On 16 December 2024, a court sentenced journalist Sandra Muhoza to 21 months in prison.<sup>11</sup> Authorities arrested Sandra for sharing a message in a WhatsApp group for media professionals about the government's alleged distribution of machetes in March 2024.<sup>12</sup> The court imposed 18 months for "undermining the integrity of the national territory" and three months for "racial aversion". The prosecution initially sought a 12-

---

<sup>6</sup> Barron's, "Burundi Opposition Decry Legislative Election Rules," 07 December 2024, <https://www.barrons.com/news/burundi-opposition-decry-legislative-election-rules-341aea81>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>7</sup> The Citizen, "How Burundi opposition party leader was dethroned while on a trip to Tanzania," 13 March 2024, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/how-burundi-opposition-party-leader-was-dethroned-while-on-a-trip-to-tanzania-4554740>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>8</sup> SOS Médias Burundi, "Bujumbura : the Constitutional Court has deemed opponents' complaints admissible but has given them a very limited deadline to correct irregularities," 9 January 2025, <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/en/2025/01/09/bujumbura-the-constitutional-court-has-deemed-opponents-complaints-admissible-but-has-given-them-a-very-limited-deadline-to-correct-irregularities/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>9</sup> SOS- Torture Burundi, "SOS-TORTURE Burundi REPORT NO. 475," 19 January 2025, <https://sostortureburundi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Weekly-report-n%C2%B0475-1.pdf>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> RSF, "Burundi: RSF condemns the 21-month-long prison sentence handed down to journalist Sandra Muhoza," 16 December 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/burundi-rsf-condemns-21-month-long-prison-sentence-handed-down-journalist-sandra-muhoza>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>12</sup> VOA, "Burundi charges journalist with 'endangering internal security'," 19 April 2024, <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/burundi-charges-journalist-with-endangering-internal-security-/7576626.html>, accessed 3 April 2025.

year sentence,<sup>13</sup> raising concerns about press freedom and the criminalisation of information sharing. The appeal she lodged is due to be examined in March 2025.

## **Djibouti**

### **General situation**

Djibouti's civic space is severely restricted, and is currently classified as “closed” by the Civicus Monitor. This means there are significant restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association, and access to information, particularly for CSOs and HRDs.<sup>14</sup>

## **Eritrea**

### **General situation**

The Horn of Africa faces a renewed threat of war, as growing tensions point to the possibility of conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea.<sup>15</sup> Observers warn that Ethiopia's push to reclaim access to Red Sea ports lost to Eritrea in the 1990s and the political turmoil in its northernmost region, Tigray has severely strained relations between the two countries. Eritrean authorities issued a directive to all regional administrations to register and mobilise citizens under the age of 60 for military re-training.<sup>16</sup> Individuals under 50 are prohibited from leaving the country. Reports indicate that regional administrations have begun informing, registering, and mobilising relevant citizens.

### **Freedom of opinion and expression**

On 16 January 2025, CPJ released its annual prison census report, ranking Eritrea as the largest jailer of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa in 2024.<sup>17</sup>

## **Ethiopia**

### **General situation**

In a statement released ahead of elections for the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), CSOs highlighted serious human rights violations in Ethiopia, urging UN member states to

---

<sup>13</sup> SOS Médias Burundi, “Bujumbura : the prosecution requested 12 years in prison against journalist Sandra Muhoza,” 13 November 2024, <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/en/2024/11/13/bujumbura-the-prosecution-requested-12-years-in-prison-against-journalist-sandra-muhoza/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>14</sup> CIVICUS Monitor, “Djibouti,” <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/djibouti/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>15</sup> International Crisis Group, “Ethiopia and Eritrea Slide Closer to War amid Tigray Upheaval,” 27 March 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopiaeritrea/ethiopia-and-eritrea-slide-closer-war-amid-tigray-upheaval>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>16</sup> HRCE, “Eritrea Orders Nationwide Military Mobilization, Raising Fears of Renewed Conflict,” 18 February 2025, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/eritrea-orders-nationwide-military-mobilization-raising-fears-of-renewed-conflict/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>17</sup> CPJ, “In record year, China, Israel, and Myanmar are world's leading jailers of journalists,” 16 January 2025, <https://cpj.org/special-reports/in-record-year-china-israel-and-myanmar-are-worlds-leading-jailers-of-journalists/#worst-offenders>, accessed 3 April 2025.

reject the country's candidacy for the HRC.<sup>18</sup> They highlighted 594 instances of human rights violations, affecting 8,253 victims, with government forces responsible for at least 70% of these violations. These included extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, sexual violence, and ethnic based killings, particularly in Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray regions.

On 10 October 2024, during the 79<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, Ethiopia was elected to the HRC for the 2025-2027 term.<sup>19</sup> This marks Ethiopia's third term on the Council, following previous memberships from 2013-2015 and 2016-2018. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted Ethiopia's commitment to advancing human rights, peace, and sustainable development during its past terms. However, organisations highlight that Ethiopia's election undermines the credibility of the HRC, given the country's human rights record.

In January 2025, Amnesty International urged CSOs to demand urgent action following the arbitrary detention of thousands in Ethiopia's Amhara region.<sup>20</sup> On 28 September 2024, security forces, including the Ethiopian army and Amhara regional units, rounded up thousands and detained them in four mass detention centres. The detainees included judges, prosecutors, and academics. While authorities released some detainees, including four judiciary workers in October 2024, and hundreds in January 2025, thousands remain in detention.<sup>21</sup>

Tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea have been rising over Ethiopia's push for maritime access and the political turmoil in its northernmost region, Tigray, sparking fears of another conflict.<sup>22</sup> Concerns persist despite Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's assurances that Ethiopia seeks access to the Red Sea through dialogue (although Prime Minister Abiy has repeatedly stressed that breaking Ethiopia's landlocked status and securing a coastline is a "vital interest").<sup>23</sup> In February 2025, Human Rights Concern - Eritrea (HRC) warned of forced conscription as Eritrea mobilised citizens under 60 for military re-training.<sup>24</sup> In March, reports emerged of Ethiopian troop movements near Eritrea's border, though officials have not clarified their intent. Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh urged the international community to demand that Ethiopia respect its

---

<sup>18</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "Ethiopia Should Not Be Elected to the UN Human Rights Council," 8 October 2024, <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/ethiopia-should-not-be-elected-to-the-un-human-rights-council/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>19</sup> ENA, "Ethiopia Elected as UN Human Rights Council Member," 10 October 2024, [https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng\\_5266541](https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_5266541), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>20</sup> Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Urgent international action needed to end mass arbitrary detentions in the Amhara Region," 28 January 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/01/ethiopia-urgent-international-action-needed-to-end-mass-arbitrary-detentions-in-the-amhara-region/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: End the month-long arbitrary detention of thousands in Amhara Region," 6 November 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/ethiopia-end-the-month-long-arbitrary-detention-of-thousands-in-amhara-region/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, "Ethiopia and Eritrea Slide Closer to War amid Tigray Upheaval," 27 March 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopiaeritrea/ethiopia-and-eritrea-slide-closer-war-amid-tigray-upheaval>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>23</sup> Al Jazeera, "Ethiopia rules out conflict with Eritrea over Red Sea access," 20 March 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/20/ethiopia-rules-out-conflict-with-eritrea-over-red-sea-access>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>24</sup> HRC, "Eritrea Orders Nationwide Military Mobilization, Raising Fears of Renewed Conflict," 18 February 2025, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/eritrea-orders-nationwide-military-mobilization-raising-fears-of-renewed-conflict/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

neighbours' sovereignty and territorial integrity, criticising its push for maritime access as outdated and misguided.<sup>25</sup>

## Freedom of association

Ethiopia's Authority for Civil Society Organisations (ACSO) has suspended, reinstated, and, in some cases, re-suspended several CSOs over alleged neutrality and governance standards violations. On 14 November 2024, ACSO suspended the activities of the Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD), a human rights organisation defending civil society participation in physical and digital spaces and promoting a democratic culture in Ethiopia, without prior warning.<sup>26</sup> On 22 November 2024, ACSO also suspended the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE), an NGO dedicated to advancing human rights protection, and Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), which supports human rights lawyers, also without prior warning. The ACSO reports that the organisations' activities "undermine public and State interests," overly vague charges that are part of Ethiopian authorities' repressive toolbox and pave the way for a further crackdown on critical and independent voices, particularly those working on human rights.<sup>27</sup>

On 11 December 2024, ACSO lifted the suspension of three organisations, CARD, AHRE, and LHR.<sup>28</sup> However, on 17 December 2024, ACSO reinstated the suspension of CARD and LHR, citing failure to "learn from past mistakes" and implement corrective measures.<sup>29</sup> CARD stated that the resuspension was unexpected, as it had not resumed its activities since the initial ban was lifted.<sup>30</sup>

On 25 December 2024, ACSO suspended two more organisations, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC).<sup>31</sup> EHRDC was accused of deviating from its founding objectives, lacking independence, and failing to ensure transparency in its structure. EHRCO faced allegations of exceeding administrative spending limits and failing to maintain independence. Both organisations rejected the claims, asserting their compliance with the law and criticising ACSO's

---

<sup>25</sup> Addis Standard, "Eritrea slams Ethiopia's maritime ambitions as 'misguided and outdated,' calls for international pressure," 19 March 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/eritrea-slams-ethiopias-maritime-ambitions-as-misguided-and-outdated-calls-for-international-pressure/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Front Line Defenders, "Arbitrary suspension of civil society organisations," 27 November 2024, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/arbitrary-suspension-civil-society-organisations>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Addis Standard, "Suspension on three rights groups lifted amid criticism of civil society crackdown," 11 December 2024, <https://addisstandard.com/suspension-on-three-rights-groups-lifted-amid-criticism-of-civil-society-crackdown/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>29</sup> Addis Standard, "CARD faces renewed suspension by civil society authority after recent lifting of ban," 18 November 2024, <https://addisstandard.com/card-faces-renewed-suspension-by-civil-society-authority-after-recent-lifting-of-ban/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>30</sup> CARD, "A Brief Statement on the Reimposition of Suspension on the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy," 26 December 2024, <https://www.cardeth.org/CARD-Reimposition-Suspension>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Addis Standard, "EHRCO, EHRDC latest rights groups suspended by Civil Society Authority, citing 'deviation' and alleged 'lack of independence,'" 26 December 2024, <https://addisstandard.com/ehrc-ehrdc-latest-rights-groups-suspended-by-civil-society-authority-citing-deviation-and-alleged-lack-of-independence/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

evaluation process as lacking legitimacy. Following sustained advocacy,<sup>32</sup> and as a group of over 30 states delivered a joint statement on the situation in Ethiopia at the UN HRC, in Geneva, ACSO lifted the suspensions on 3 March 2025. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) stated that it had engaged with ACSO, government authorities, and the affected CSOs to push for reinstatements, leading to a successful outcome.<sup>33</sup> CSOs have warned, however, that the lifting of suspensions might be temporary and that civic space restrictions remained in place.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the repeated suspensions have raised concerns about civil society's operational space in Ethiopia, with organisations calling for clearer regulations and fairer evaluation processes. Increasing restrictions on civic space and the lack of accountability for targeting HRDs undermine freedoms and weaken democratic oversight.

In recent months, prominent HRDs were forced to leave the country and the authorities, including Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, publicly smeared and targeted human rights actors, including Ethiopia's national human rights institution, EHRC, and NGOs, which are regularly accused of being "foreign agents" and of working against national interests.<sup>35</sup>

On 10 February 2025, Ethiopian opposition politician Lidetu Ayalew accused the government of imposing a travel ban and attempting to seize his property.<sup>36</sup> He was barred from boarding a flight from Atlanta to Ethiopia after Ethiopian Airlines informed him that the government had instructed airlines to deny him entry. Lidetu described the move as "politically motivated" and aimed at preventing opposition figures from participating in upcoming elections. Lidetu was imprisoned for five months in 2020 despite multiple court rulings ordering his release.<sup>37</sup> He was previously blocked from travelling abroad for medical treatment and only left Ethiopia with support from human rights organisations and a court order.<sup>38</sup>

On 9 March 2025, security forces detained Yohannes Tessema, a Benishangul-Gumuz Regional Council representative and member of the Boro Democratic Party (BDP).<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> DefendDefenders, "Ethiopia: Defend and Strengthen the Human Rights Movement Against Erosion!", 13 January 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/ethiopia-defend-and-strengthen-the-human-rights-movement/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>33</sup> EHRC, "Lifting of the Suspension of Four Civil Society Organizations," 3 March 2025, <https://ehrc.org/lifting-of-the-suspension-of-four-civil-society-organizations/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>34</sup> X, "DefendDefenders" 25 March 2025, <https://x.com/DefendDefenders/status/1902723891367207034>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>35</sup> OMCT, "Ethiopia: Arbitrary suspension of Human rights organisations in Ethiopia is a major setback to Civic space," 28 November 2024, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/ethiopia-arbitrary-suspension-of-human-rights-organisations-in-ethiopia-is-a-major-setback-to-civic-space>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Addis Standard, "Opposition politician Lidetu Ayalew accuses Ethiopian government of plans to seize his property following travel ban," 17 February 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/lidetu-ayalew-alleges-government-plans-to-seize-property-amid-travel-ban/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Addis Standard, "Lidetu Ayalew Remains in Police Custody Despite Oromia Supreme Court's Decision to Grant Bail," 7 October 2020, <https://addisstandard.com/news-update-lidetu-ayalew-remains-in-police-custody-despite-oromia-supreme-courts-decision-to-grant-bail/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>38</sup> Addis Standard, "Court dismisses Lidetu Ayalew's police travel ban after his repeated attempts were blocked," 29 April 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-court-dismisses-lidetu-ayalews-police-travel-ban-after-his-repeated-attempts-were-blocked/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>39</sup> Addis Standard, "Boro Democratic Party member detained after petitioning constitutional changes in Benishangul-Gumuz, party says," 10 March 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/boro-democratic-party->

Before the arrest, authorities stopped Yohannes and two other council members at Asosa Airport while en route to Addis Ababa to discuss the petition. The arrest came days after BDP petitioned Ethiopia's Council of Constitutional Inquiry on 24 February 2025, challenging recent amendments to the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional Constitution. The amendments expanded council seats from 99 to 165, dissolved three electoral districts, and created five new ones. BDP argues that the council lacks the authority to make such changes, which should fall under the jurisdiction of the House of Federation and the National Election Board. On 6 March 2025, the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional Government Communications Affairs Bureau accused BDP leaders of inciting unrest and dismissed their petition, warning that authorities would take legal action to maintain order.

On 18 March 2025, authorities presented Yohannes Tessema in court after revoking his parliamentary immunity. They accused him of using social media to incite conflict, harm the reputation of the Benishangul-Gumuz region and its council, and fuel ethnic divisions.<sup>40</sup> Officials also alleged that he had links to groups seeking to overthrow the government by force.

### **Freedom of opinion and expression**

On 25 November 2024, government forces detained 16 residents of Darra district in Oromia region, after they raised concerns to the media about violence and recent civilian killings by the Fano forces, an armed militia in Amhara Region.<sup>41</sup> Accusations against them include the vaguely-worded offence of "inciting public division." This crackdown on free speech and civic engagement reflects the government's increasing repression and adds to the illegal reported series of arrests in various parts of the Amhara region.<sup>42</sup>

On 16 January 2025, CPJ released its annual prison census report, ranking Ethiopia as the second largest jailer of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa in 2024,<sup>43</sup> following Eritrea.

On 17 April 2025, Ethiopian federal police raided the private home of a senior staff member and the offices of *Addis Standard*, detaining three journalists without producing copies of the alleged warrants. Authorities accused the team of preparing a documentary intended to incite violence—an unfounded claim, as the outlet lacks documentary

---

[member-detained-after-petitioning-constitutional-changes-in-benishangul-gumuz-party-says/](#), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Addis Standard, "Benishangul-Gumuz regional council member, opposition leader, appears in court after immunity lifted; remanded for 14-day investigation," 18 March 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/benishangul-gumuz-regional-council-member-opposition-leader-appears-in-court-after-immunity-lifted-remanded-for-14-day-investigation/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Addis Standard, "Sixteen detained in Oromia's Darra district after media statements on violence and civilian killings, as teen's beheading sparks social media outrage," 25 November 2024, <https://addisstandard.com/sixteen-detained-in-oromias-darra-district-after-media-statements-on-violence-and-civilian-killings-as-teens-beheading-sparks-social-media-outrage/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>42</sup> Addis Standard, "EHRC expresses concern over 'mass arbitrary detentions' in Amhara Region, calls for legal due process amid ongoing crackdown," 7 October 2024, <https://addisstandard.com/ehrc-expresses-concern-over-mass-arbitrary-detentions-in-amhara-region-calls-for-legal-due-process-amid-ongoing-crackdown/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>43</sup> CPJ, "In record year, China, Israel, and Myanmar are world's leading jailers of journalists," 16 January 2025, <https://cpj.org/special-reports/in-record-year-china-israel-and-myanmar-are-worlds-leading-jailers-of-journalists/#worst-offenders>, accessed 3 April 2025.

production capacity.<sup>44</sup> During the raid, police forcibly confiscated laptops, phones, and data storage devices, demanded passwords, and instructed staff to remain silent about the incident. The seized electronics remain in police custody, exposing *Addis Standard's* communication systems to potential misuse, including impersonation, misinformation, and efforts to incriminate staff.<sup>45</sup>

Separately, on 17 April 2025, the Ethiopian parliament approved an amendment to Ethiopia's Mass Media Proclamation with draconian provisions that transgress the independence of the media regulatory body and oust the participation of CSOs.<sup>46</sup> The amendment grants the Prime Minister the Authority to nominate the Director General of the Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA), a role reserved previously for the House; it repeals Articles 9(1) and 9(2), which required that board members be appointed "openly and transparently"; Article 11(6), the provision that stipulated a board member shall not be "a member or employee of a political party" has been removed; it repeals Article 9(5)(a), which had required the board to include two members each from CSOs, media, and "other institutions that have relevance to the media sector." Additionally, the amendments transfer licensing and regulations, including the authority, to refuse license registration, renewals, suspensions, revocations, warnings, fines, and program terminations from the board to the EMA itself. These amendments reverse the progress made under Proclamation 1238/2021 and contribute to the shrinking media space in Ethiopia.

## Kenya

### General situation

The 2024 People Power Under Attack report, released by CIVICUS in December 2024, downgraded Kenya from the "*Obstructed*" to "*Repressed*" category, signaling a significant and ongoing deterioration in civic space.<sup>47</sup>

Kenya recorded its worst year for femicides in 2024, with approximately 170 reported cases.<sup>48</sup> The numbers highlight a growing crisis of violence against women and girls, with young women aged 18 to 35 being the most affected. According to reports, intimate partner violence remains the leading cause of these deaths. According to the National Police Service, at least 97 women were killed in femicide between August and October.<sup>49</sup> While these figures are alarming, experts caution that the actual number of femicide cases

---

<sup>44</sup> CPJ, "Ethiopian police raid Addis Standard, detain 3 managers," 22 April 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/04/ethiopian-police-raid-addis-standard-detain-3-managers/>, accessed 29 April 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Facebook, "Addis Standard," 18 April 2025, [https://www.facebook.com/AddisstandardEng/posts/public-notice-regarding-federal-police-raid-on-addis-standard-and-mass-confiscat/1086482996850269/?\\_rdc=2&\\_rdr#](https://www.facebook.com/AddisstandardEng/posts/public-notice-regarding-federal-police-raid-on-addis-standard-and-mass-confiscat/1086482996850269/?_rdc=2&_rdr#), accessed 29 April 2025.

<sup>46</sup> The reporter, "Freedoms Under Fire: New Media Law Walks Back Years of Progress," 26 April 2025, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/44895/>, accessed 29 April 2025.

<sup>47</sup> CIVICUS Monitor, "PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK 2024," 4 December 2024, [https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings\\_2024/](https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2024/), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Africa Data Hub, "Silencing women: tracking and humanizing Femicide cases in Kenya," 25 January 2025, <https://www.africadatahub.org/femicide-kenya>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>49</sup> Al Jazeera, "Police use tear gas on Kenya protesters rallying against femicide," 10 December 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/10/police-fire-tear-gas-at-kenya-protest-against-gender-based-violence>, accessed 3 April 2025.

is likely much higher due to underreporting. Many cases go uninvestigated or are classified under different categories, masking the true extent of GBV in the country.

Since the anti-finance bill protests in June 2024, Kenya witnessed a surge in abductions and enforced disappearances. The Kenya National Human Rights Commission (KNHRC) documented 82 cases between June and December 2024, with 29 individuals still missing.<sup>50</sup> Government critics have been the primary targets. Security agents are widely suspected to be behind these disappearances, though authorities deny involvement. Despite official claims that the government does not engage in extrajudicial killings or abductions, evidence suggests otherwise. Reports highlight discrepancies between police records and autopsy findings in cases involving anti-government protesters.<sup>51</sup> In November,<sup>52</sup> President Ruto dismissed reports of abductions as “fake news” but later in December pledged to stop the abduction of government critics.<sup>53</sup> Human rights activists argue that his remarks signal an acknowledgement of state involvement or complicity in these incidents.

On 30 December 2024, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights called on the Kenyan government to end abductions and enforced disappearances.<sup>54</sup> The Commission urged authorities to conduct thorough, transparent, and impartial investigations into all reported cases. It also emphasised the need to strengthen oversight bodies, including the Police Oversight Commission, the judiciary, and the KNHRC, to ensure they can effectively prevent and address such violations. Additionally, The Commission called for immediate support to families of the disappeared by cooperating in investigations, providing legal assistance, and ensuring access to justice. It also stressed the importance of promptly informing families and the public about arrests or detentions and ensuring detainees appear in court without delay.

On 14 January 2025, Public Service Minister Justin Muturi, in a written statement to police, alleged that the National Intelligence Service (NIS) was responsible for his son’s abduction during the June 2024 anti-government protests.<sup>55</sup> Muturi stated that his son, Leslie, was taken by “armed, hooded gangsters” and was only released after President

---

<sup>50</sup> KNCHR, “Statement on the Recent Surge of Abductions/Enforced Disappearances in Kenya,” 26 December 2024, [https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1213/Statement-on-the-Recent-Surge-of-AbductionsEnforced-Disappearances-in-Kenya#:~:text=Seven%20\(7\)%20of%20the%20recent,the%20dictates%20of%20the%20Constitution](https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1213/Statement-on-the-Recent-Surge-of-AbductionsEnforced-Disappearances-in-Kenya#:~:text=Seven%20(7)%20of%20the%20recent,the%20dictates%20of%20the%20Constitution), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>51</sup> Reuters, “How Kenya police hid killings of anti-government protesters,” 6 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/how-kenya-police-cover-up-killings-anti-government-protesters-2025-01-06/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>52</sup> The Standard, “Ruto downplays abduction cases stating some are normal arrests,” November 2024, [https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001506790/ruto-downplays-abduction-cases-stating-some-are-normal-arrests#google\\_vignette](https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001506790/ruto-downplays-abduction-cases-stating-some-are-normal-arrests#google_vignette), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>53</sup> CNN, “Kenya’s president promises to stop abductions following wave of disappearances,” 28 December 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/28/africa/kenya-president-halt-abductions-critics-intl-latam/index.html>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>54</sup> ACHPR, “The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights urges action against abductions and forced disappearances in Kenya,” 30 December 2024, <https://achprau.int/en/news/press-releases/2024-12-30/african-commission-human-and-peoples-rights-urges-action-against>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>55</sup> Reuters, “Kenyan minister says son was abducted by intelligence service,” 15 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenyan-minister-says-son-was-abducted-by-intelligence-service-2025-01-15/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

William Ruto personally intervened. He described visiting the presidential residence on 23 June 2024, where Ruto then called NIS Director General Noordin Haji to secure Leslie's release.

Separately, former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua accused the Kenya Kwanza administration of using abductions to silence critics. In December 2024, he described the reported abductions as a "security crisis" and condemned the NIS for its inaction on the matter.<sup>56</sup> These claims add to growing concerns over the use of enforced disappearances as a tool to suppress dissent, raising questions about state accountability and the protection of civil liberties in Kenya.

On 16 November 2024, Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye was abducted in Nairobi and forcibly transferred to Uganda in a covert operation involving both governments.<sup>57</sup> He had travelled for a book launch but was lured to an apartment under the pretence of meeting potential political backers. Shortly after arriving, eight men in plain clothes claiming to be Kenyan police stormed the room, declaring Besigye and his associate Lutale under arrest. Despite his protests that he was uninvolved with any suspicious items in the room, the men ignored his pleas. Four of them forced Besigye and Lutale into a car with Kenyan plates and secretly transported them toward the Ugandan border.

Ugandan authorities justified the abduction by claiming they had gathered intelligence on Besigye's alleged crimes. Uganda's Information Minister, Chris Baryomunsi, admitted to planning the arrest in Nairobi, while the Ugandan army spokesman, Brigadier General Felix Kulayigye, referenced a security agreement between Kenya and Uganda—though he failed to explain why no formal extradition process was followed.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, Kenyan officials denied involvement, despite clear indications of coordination between the two governments. Besigye now faces trial in Kampala instead of Nairobi, raising concerns over Kenya's role in enabling cross border abductions and undermining legal protections. His case highlights the ongoing threats faced by opposition leaders in East Africa and the continued use of illegal renditions to silence political dissent.

On 12 January 2025, Tanzanian activist Maria Sarungi Tsehai was abducted outside a Nairobi salon in broad daylight. She reported that unidentified men, claiming to be police officers, pulled her from a taxi around 3 p.m. and forced her into a van.<sup>59</sup> They blindfolded, choked, and restrained her with handcuffs, pinning her down by sitting on her feet. Her abductors confiscated her phones and repeatedly demanded access to her social media accounts, which she refused to provide. Hours later, they released her in the city's outskirts but kept her devices. Maria believes the abduction was an attempt to access her digital communications, likely linked to her activism and criticism of the Tanzanian government. Maria fled Tanzania in 2020 after facing escalating threats under the late

---

<sup>56</sup> The Eastleigh Voice, "Gachagua blames NIS for surge in abductions, calls on Ruto to address the matter," 27 December 2024, <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/national/100042/gachagua-blames-nis-for-surge-in-abductions-calls-on-ruto-to-address-the-matter>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>57</sup> Al Jazeera, "Uganda's Kizza Besigye 'kidnapped' in Kenya, taken to military court," 20 November 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/20/ugandan-opposition-politician-kidnapped-in-kenya-taken-to-military-jail>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>58</sup> BBC, "How a Ugandan opposition leader disappeared in Kenya and ended up in military court," 2 December 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp8x3vr6zj2o>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>59</sup> YouTube, "The Nation: Tanzanian activist Maria Sarungi recounts her abduction in Nairobi," 13 January 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgMGuYAEZRA>, accessed 3 April 2025.

President John Magufuli's administration.<sup>60</sup> In recent months, she had raised alarms about her safety, citing incidents of unknown individuals searching for her at her residence. These claims add to growing concerns over the use of enforced disappearances as a tool to suppress dissent, raising questions about state accountability and the protection of civil liberties in Kenya.

In January 2025, the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), a global network of investigative journalists, named deposed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as the "Most Corrupt Person of the Year (2024)." Kenyan President William Ruto ranked as the first runner-up. The OCCRP opened public nominations for the title in November, receiving a record breaking 40,000 nominations for Ruto.<sup>61</sup> However, the judges ultimately selected Assad, citing his significant role in perpetuating organised crime and corruption worldwide.

### **Freedom of association**

Unknown assailants killed Raymond Otieno, a HRD in Molo on 18 January 2025. Authorities discovered his body near his apartment gate.<sup>62</sup> Reports reveal that he had received death threats before his murder. The Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) confirmed that expert analysis determined his cause of death as a severe head injury caused by both blunt and sharp force trauma. His killing triggered public outrage and protests.<sup>63</sup> On 3 February 2025, police arrested five suspects linked to the murder, who remain in custody. Among them, two had previously assaulted Otieno in November 2024.<sup>64</sup>

On 6 February 2025, bystanders found the body of Salman Loa Peikine, a Turkana based HRD, at Lodwar Funeral Home. His friends and family had searched for him after he failed to return home from a social gathering in Lokichar on 5 February.<sup>65</sup> Witnesses reported that they discovered his body on the morning of 6 February along the Lodwar-Lokichar highway before it was taken to the funeral home. The reason for his death remains unclear. However, it raises serious concerns about the safety of HRDs in Kenya, especially following the recent killing of Raymond Otieno, a Molo based activist.

### **Freedom of peaceful assembly**

---

<sup>60</sup> BBC, "'Manhandled and choked' - Tanzanian activist recounts abduction," 13 January 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd7dxz48e01o>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>61</sup> OCCRP, "Most Corrupt Person of the Year (2024)," 28 January 2025, <https://www.occrp.org/en/person-of-the-year/bashar-al-assad>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>62</sup> The Star, "DCI: Molo activist Otieno was killed unknown by assailants," 25 January 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-01-25-dci-molo-activist-otieno-was-killed-unknown-by-assailants>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>63</sup> The Star, "Protests as popular Nakuru youth leader found murdered," 19 January 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-01-19-protests-as-popular-nakuru-youth-leader-found-murdered>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Nation, "Five suspects arrested in murder of Molo activist Richard Otieno," 3 February 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/nakuru/five-suspects-arrested-in-murder-of-molo-activist-richard-otieno-4911000>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>65</sup> X, "@DefendersKe," 7 February 2025, <https://x.com/DefendersKE/status/1887880106942824819>, accessed 3 April 2025.

Despite public outcry and nationwide protests, the femicide crisis persists. On 20 November, President Ruto allocated 100 million Kenya Shillings to combat femicide by creating safe homes, safe space campaigns and supporting policies that protect women.<sup>66</sup> However, on 10 December 2024, nationwide protests took place against femicide. In Nairobi, police officers, including those in plain clothes, forcefully dispersed a peaceful protest using teargas, rubber bullets, and excessive force despite organisers meeting legal requirements for notification.<sup>67</sup> Authorities unlawfully detained 10 protesters, charging five with participating in an "unlawful assembly," while the others were released unconditionally. Among those charged was Amnesty Kenya's director, Irungu Houghton. On 16 December, authorities released all five detainees.<sup>68</sup> The government's use of force against protesters has drawn criticism, with activists questioning its commitment to addressing GBV while simultaneously suppressing civic action.

On 30 December 2024, nationwide protests broke out in response to rising abductions and enforced disappearances in Kenya.<sup>69</sup> Despite being peaceful, security forces used excessive force, deploying teargas and violently dispersing demonstrators. A group of CSOs reported that at least 50 unarmed protesters, including Senator Okiya Omtatah, former presidential aspirant Reuben Kigame, and several HRDs, were teargassed and arrested in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Eldoret.<sup>70</sup> In Nairobi and Mombasa, 18 protesters suffered injuries, including blunt force trauma, minor cuts, and respiratory distress from tear gas exposure. Reports also indicate that four detainees faced assault and torture inflicted by batons and rifle butts inside a Nairobi police station. Human rights groups continue to condemn the state's escalating crackdown on peaceful dissent.

A Nairobi court rejected a police request on 31 December 2024 to detain 23 protesters arrested during an anti abduction demonstration, denying law enforcement's bid for a 14 day investigative hold. Instead, the court granted their release on a KSh 50,000 bond with surety or a KSh 1,000 cash bail.<sup>71</sup> On 21 January 2025, the High Court further ruled in favour of the protesters, ordering the release of their confiscated phones, which had been seized during their 30 December arrest.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Citizen Digital, "President Ruto allocates Ksh.100M to combat femicide," 20 November 2024, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/president-ruto-allocates-ksh100m-to-combat-femicide-n353277>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>67</sup> Al Jazeera, "Police use tear gas on Kenya protesters rallying against femicide," 10 December 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/10/police-fire-tear-gas-at-kenya-protest-against-gender-based-violence>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>68</sup> Amnesty International, "Statement Condemning the Arbitrary Detention without charge of Human Rights Defenders, following The End Femicide March held on 10 December 2024," 16 December 2024, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/statement-condemning-the-arbitrary-detention-without-charge-of-human-rights-defenders-following-the-end-femicide-march-held-on-10-december-2024/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>69</sup> Reuters, "Police in Kenya fire teargas at protest over alleged abductions," 30 December 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/police-kenya-fire-teargas-disperse-protesters-reuters-witnesses-2024-12-30/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>70</sup> Amnesty International, "Joint Statement on Police Conduct During December 30th 2024 Nation Wide Protests," 30 December 2024, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/joint-statement-on-police-conduct-during-december-30th-2024-nation-wide-protests/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>71</sup> Nation, "Omtatah and 22 protesters freed as court rejects police bid to detain them," 31 December 2024, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/omtatah-and-22-protesters-freed-as-court-rejects-police-bid-to-detain-them-4874722>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>72</sup> Capital News, "Court orders release of phones to Omtatah, 23 others arrested during Dec 30 Anti-Abduction Protest," 21 January 2025, <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2025/01/court-orders-release->

On 6 February 2025, the High Court quashed a directive prohibiting protests in Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD), declaring it unconstitutional.<sup>73</sup> Justice Bahati Mwamuye ruled that Inspector General of Police Douglas Kanja's order undermined Article 37 of the Constitution, which upholds the right to peaceful assembly, and failed to meet the legal criteria under Article 24 for restricting fundamental freedoms. The ruling also nullified a press statement issued by Kanja on 17 July 2024, which sought to justify the ban by citing security risks and claims of criminal infiltration.<sup>74</sup> The Court emphasised that such restrictions could not be imposed arbitrarily.

The Katiba Institute, which challenged the directive in court, maintained that Inspector General Kanja had exceeded his mandate by attempting to regulate the conditions under which constitutional rights could be exercised. The petitioners argued that the ban was an unjustified restriction on public demonstrations, particularly during the *Gen Z* led protests.<sup>75</sup> Justice Mwamuye agreed, stating that the order was "overly broad, blanket, and omnibus in nature," making it unconstitutional and unenforceable. This ruling represents a crucial victory for human rights and civil liberties, reaffirming protections against state imposed restrictions on fundamental freedoms.

### **Freedom of opinion and expression**

On 23 October 2024, a group of preachers in Kiambu raised concerns over alleged government interference in their religious practices, claiming that state officials are closely surveilling their sermons and congregants.<sup>76</sup> During a press conference, clergy members revealed that unidentified individuals, believed to be government agents, had been attending church services without identifying themselves and later questioned congregants about invited guests. Some preachers reported that local chiefs are now demanding explanations about sermon content and details of attendees. The preachers condemned these actions as a violation of religious freedom and the right to worship without intimidation. They called on the government to respect constitutional rights and cease any unwarranted surveillance of religious institutions.

Safaricom, Kenya's largest telecommunications provider, is under fire for suppressing press freedom and intimidating human rights organisations following an exposé on its involvement in mass surveillance. On 29 October 2024, Nation Media Group published an investigative report revealing that Safaricom, in collaboration with Neural Technologies Limited, had developed software that gave Kenyan security agencies access to private

---

[of-phones-to-omatah-23-others-arrested-during-dec-30-anti-abduction-protest/?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=court-orders-release-of-phones-to-omatah-23-others-arrested-during-dec-30-anti-abduction-protest](https://www.nation.africa/kenya/counties/nairobi/kanja-s-ban-on-anti-govt-protests-in-nairobi-cbd-quashed-4916102), 3 April 2025.

<sup>73</sup> Nation, "Kanja's ban on anti-govt protests in Nairobi CBD quashed," 6 February 2025,

<https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/nairobi/kanja-s-ban-on-anti-govt-protests-in-nairobi-cbd-quashed-4916102>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>74</sup> Nation, "Police ban anti-government protests in Nairobi CBD," 17 July 2024,

<https://nation.africa/kenya/news/police-ban-anti-government-protests-in-nairobi-cbd-4693926>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>75</sup> The Eastleigh Voice, "High Court declares ban on Nairobi CBD protests unconstitutional," 6 February 2025, <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/ig%20douglas%20kanja/112564/high-court-declares-ban-on-nairobi-cbd-protests-unconstitutional>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>76</sup> Citizen Digital, "Section of Kiambu preachers decry intimidation by State operatives," 23 October 2024, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/section-of-kiambu-preachers-decry-intimidation-by-state-operatives-n351773>, accessed 3 April 2025.

consumer data.<sup>77</sup> The system reportedly enabled authorities to track and capture suspects despite the security forces' long standing record of enforced disappearances, renditions, and extrajudicial killings.

In response, Safaricom threatened Nation Media Group and its journalists with a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) on 31 October, demanding a retraction and correction of the article.<sup>78</sup> Days later, the telecom giant withdrew advertising from the media house, which was a significant financial blow.<sup>79</sup> The company also extended its threats to human rights organisations that demanded accountability.<sup>80</sup> On 18 November, Safaricom sent a legal warning to the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) after they published a joint statement calling for transparency.<sup>81</sup> The Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF) later revealed that Safaricom pressured KHRC to retract the letter, signalling a broader crackdown on dissent.<sup>82</sup> On 17 December, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemned the actions and called for the protection of investigative journalists.<sup>83</sup>

In December alone, unidentified individuals abducted seven online critics in separate incidents, with only one resurfacing.<sup>84</sup> Some victims were allegedly targeted after AI-generated images of the president in a coffin circulated online.<sup>85</sup> Authorities abducted Gideon Kibet and his brother Ronny Kiplangat after Gideon posted cartoons critical of President William Ruto and his government on social media. On 6 January 2025, five of six missing Kenyans, including student Billy Muniyiri Mwangi, content creator Bernard Kavuli, Peter Muteti, Gideon Kibet, and his brother Ronny Kiplangat were found alive after being released in different locations under unclear circumstances. However, Steve Mbisi

---

<sup>77</sup> Nation, "Exclusive: How Kenyan police use mobile phones to track, capture suspects," 29 October 2024, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/exclusive-how-kenyan-police-use-mobile-phones-to-track-capture-suspects-4804416#story>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>78</sup> RSF, "Kenya: the telecommunications operator Safaricom is pressuring Nation Media Group due to its investigation into widespread surveillance," 17 December 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/kenya-telecommunications-operator-safaricom-pressuring-nation-media-group-due-its-investigation>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>79</sup> Techcabal, "Safaricom suspends advertising on Nation Media Group publications over critical coverage," 12 November 2024, <https://techcabal.com/2024/11/12/safaricom-suspends-ads-nmg/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>80</sup> X, "@ccf-kenya," 1 December 2024, [https://x.com/cff\\_kenya/status/1863152526574407842](https://x.com/cff_kenya/status/1863152526574407842), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>81</sup> X, "@theKHRC," 14 November 2024, <https://x.com/thekhrc/status/1857063401165386134>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>82</sup> X, "@ccf-kenya," 1 December 2024, [https://x.com/cff\\_kenya/status/1863152526574407842](https://x.com/cff_kenya/status/1863152526574407842), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>83</sup> RSF, "Kenya: the telecommunications operator Safaricom is pressuring Nation Media Group due to its investigation into widespread surveillance," 17 December 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/kenya-telecommunications-operator-safaricom-pressuring-nation-media-group-due-its-investigation>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>84</sup> KNCHR, "Statement on the Recent Surge of Abductions/Enforced Disappearances in Kenya," 26 December 2024, [https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1213/Statement-on-the-Recent-Surge-of-AbductionsEnforced-Disappearances-in-Kenya#:~:text=Seven%20\(7\)%20of%20the%20recent,the%20dictates%20of%20the%20Constitution](https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1213/Statement-on-the-Recent-Surge-of-AbductionsEnforced-Disappearances-in-Kenya#:~:text=Seven%20(7)%20of%20the%20recent,the%20dictates%20of%20the%20Constitution), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>85</sup> BBC, "Five missing Kenyan youths freed amid uproar over abductions," 6 January 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ced8q1yxggqo>, accessed 3 April 2025.

remains missing. In a CNN interview, those who returned stated they did not know who detained them but have since stopped criticising the government online or gone silent.<sup>86</sup>

On 15 January 2025, frustrated patients disrupted a media conference by the Health Cabinet Secretary, protesting the poor quality of services under the Social Health Authority (SHA).<sup>87</sup> Despite paying monthly premiums, they reported severe delays in accessing treatment due to systemic failures, forcing them to spend excessive amounts on daily hospital visits, some for over a week. Grace Njoki Munai led the protest, accusing Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) of neglect after waiting seven days for treatment. On 23 January, DCI officers arrested her and forcibly removed Grace Mulei from Ladnan Hospital, where she was seeking medical care.<sup>88</sup> Authorities detained Njoki at Capitol Hill and charged her with creating a disturbance in a government office, denying her bail in violation of Article 49(1)(h) of the Kenyan Constitution. Despite requiring urgent knee surgery and suffering from hypertension and diabetes, she spent a night in detention.<sup>89</sup> A court later granted her bail at Sh 10,000 and scheduled her next hearing for 7 February. Following public outcry, the Ministry of Health (MoH) withdrew its case against Njoki on 30 January.<sup>90</sup> The National Assembly announced the decision after a mid-term MPs' retreat in Naivasha, where legislators demanded the ministry drop all charges.

On 16 January 2025, the Kenyan government has ordered social media companies to establish physical offices in the country, citing the need for accountability and measures against digital platform misuse.<sup>91</sup> The directive follows months of tension over critical online content targeting top officials, including President William Ruto. Relatedly, on 28 January 2025, ICT and Digital Economy Cabinet Secretary William Kabogo warned that the government could shut down social media platforms if national security is at risk.<sup>92</sup> While he stated there were no immediate plans to disrupt internet access, he emphasised tighter regulation of online spaces and warned against misuse, citing potential prosecution under the Misuse of Computer and Cybercrimes Act.

---

<sup>86</sup> CNN, "Kenyan government critics mysteriously disappeared. They came back silenced," 9 January 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/09/africa/kenya-government-critics-intl/index.html>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>87</sup> Nation, "More SHA hitches exposed as patients storm Health ministry offices," 15 January 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/health/more-sha-hitches-exposed-as-patients-storm-health-ministry-offices-4890288>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>88</sup> The Star, "DCI: Why we've arrested Grace Njoki Mulei," 24 January 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-01-24-dci-why-weve-arrested-grace-njoki-mulei>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>89</sup> Amnesty International, "STATEMENT ON THE ARREST OF PATIENT GRACE NJOKI MULEI WHILE SEEKING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FOR A KNEE SURGERY," 23 January 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/statement-on-the-arrest-of-patient-grace-njoki-mulei/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>90</sup> Citizen Digital, "Ministry of Health agrees to drop case against SHA protester Grace Njoki," 30 January 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/ministry-of-health-agrees-to-drop-case-against-sha-protester-grace-njoki-n356782>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Capital News, "Govt Directs Social Media Firms to Set Up Physical Offices in Kenya To Curb Misuse," 16 January 2025, [https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2025/01/govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse/?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse](https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2025/01/govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>92</sup> Capital Business, "Gov't hints at social media shutdown over national security threats," 28 January 2025, <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/business/2025/01/govt-hints-at-social-media-shutdown-over-national-security-threats/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

Both measures reflect the government's increasing efforts to control digital spaces, as officials justify these actions by claiming they are necessary to combat disinformation, online abuse, and incitement. However, it could be argued that such directives are veiled attempts to stifle dissent and restrict online political expression. Furthermore, civil society groups warn that these regulations undermine free speech and set a dangerous precedent for suppressing digital rights under the pretext of national security.<sup>93</sup>

Mumias East MP Peter Salasya accused President William Ruto of attempting to intimidate him following his outspoken criticism during a visit to Kakamega.<sup>94</sup> Speaking on *Spice FM* on 24 January 2025, Salasya alleged that after raising concerns about key national issues, he faced threats and was dismissed due to his limited experience in politics. Salasya urged Ruto to address the growing financial burden on Kenyans, warning that failure to act could erode public support. During the launch of bonus payments to sugarcane farmers in Mumias, he accused the president's advisors of concealing the true state of the economy. He also condemned excessive deductions from workers' pay slips, calling for immediate intervention.<sup>95</sup> Salasya suggested that prioritising citizens' welfare would benefit Ruto politically.

Authorities in Isiolo arrested 50 youths on 8 February 2025, shortly after a group heckled President William Ruto during his visit to the town.<sup>96</sup> Residents and activists claim the crackdown was politically motivated, describing chaotic scenes where security forces allegedly rounded up individuals indiscriminately. The youths were released on 10 February after pleading guilty to charges of being drunk and disorderly. A magistrate ruled that the offences were minor and pardoned them under Section 35, waiving any fines.<sup>97</sup> County Commissioner Geoffrey Omoding defended the arrests, insisting they were part of an ongoing operation against drug peddlers in Isiolo and Marsabit.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Interior Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen denied any political motive, claiming the crackdown targeted smugglers.<sup>99</sup> However, human rights activists rejected

---

<sup>93</sup> Capital News, "Govt Directs Social Media Firms to Set Up Physical Offices in Kenya To Curb Misuse," 16 January 2025, [https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2025/01/govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse/?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse](https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2025/01/govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=govt-directs-social-media-firms-to-set-up-physical-offices-in-kenya-to-curb-misuse), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>94</sup> The Standard, "Salasya: I am being intimidated for criticising the President," January 2025, [https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/politics/article/2001510302/salasya-i-am-being-intimidated-for-criticising-the-president?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR03-2\\_1ZINqjvci7HyY5alV8t7-WbY9lnjdf44kMd-SL3yw5hHP4VA0VRs\\_aem\\_xt36g3CK04H0qlkH\\_nunUw](https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/politics/article/2001510302/salasya-i-am-being-intimidated-for-criticising-the-president?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR03-2_1ZINqjvci7HyY5alV8t7-WbY9lnjdf44kMd-SL3yw5hHP4VA0VRs_aem_xt36g3CK04H0qlkH_nunUw), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>95</sup> The standard, "Act or lose support, Salasya tells Ruto," January 2025, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001509989/act-or-lose-support-salasya-tells-ruto>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>96</sup> Nation, "Trouble for dozens after Ruto heckling," 10 February 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/isiolo/trouble-for-dozens-after-ruto-heckling--4921316>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>97</sup> Citizen Digital, "50 Isiolo youth arrested after heckling President Ruto released with warning," 10 February 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/50-isiolo-youth-arrested-after-heckling-president-ruto-released-with-warning-n357391>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>98</sup> The Eastleigh Voice, "Court releases 50 Isiolo youths detained in security swoop," 11 February 2025, <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/northern-kenya/113745/court-releases-50-isiolo-youths-detained-in-security-swoop>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>99</sup> Nation, "CS Murkomen: Arrests of Isiolo youth not political, only targeted drug smugglers," 13 February 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/videos/cs-murkomen-arrests-of-isiolo-youth-not-political-only-targeted-drug-smugglers-4925248>, accessed 3 April 2025.

these justifications, accusing the government of weaponising law enforcement to silence dissent and intimidate residents.

## **Rwanda**

### **General situation**

In October 2024, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) deferred Rwanda's National Commission for Human Rights' re-accreditation to the first session of 2026, citing its failure to recognise and publicly report serious human rights violations, including torture.<sup>100</sup>

On 17 March 2025, Rwanda cut diplomatic ties with Belgium and ordered all Belgian diplomats to leave the country within 48 hours, prompting a swift response from Brussels.<sup>101</sup> The Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation accused Belgium of consistently undermining Kigali during the ongoing conflict in the DRC. Tensions between the DRC and Rwanda have escalated in recent months, fuelled by the M23 insurgency's advance in eastern DRC and a deepening humanitarian crisis.<sup>102</sup>

### **Freedom of association**

On 27 March 2025, the Rwanda Governance Board escalated its response to the diplomatic rift with Belgium by banning all international and national NGOs, Faith-based organisations, and Common-Benefit Foundations registered in Rwanda from cooperating in any way with the Government of Belgium or its affiliated entities.<sup>103</sup> The Board immediately halted all collaboration, partnerships, and engagements involving Belgian institutions, agencies, programmes, and other non-governmental cooperation actors. It directed all organisations to terminate and report any ongoing projects or agreements linked to these entities without delay. The directive also barred organisations from receiving or disbursing funds, grants, donations, or financial contributions from or to Belgian institutions, including budget support, project funding, technical assistance, and third-party payments. The Board warned that any attempts to bypass these restrictions, such as through subsidiaries or partner organisations, would trigger strict penalties. It further cautioned that non-compliance could lead to suspension of registration or revocation of legal status, alongside additional legal or administrative action, as permitted under Rwandan law.

### **Freedom of opinion and expression**

---

<sup>100</sup> GANHRI, "GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditation Report – Second Session SCA 2024," 18 October 2024, [https://ganhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/SCA-Report-2nd-Session-2024-dec\\_EN.pdf](https://ganhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/SCA-Report-2nd-Session-2024-dec_EN.pdf), accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>101</sup> Al Jazeera, "Rwanda severs diplomatic ties with Belgium," 17 March 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/9/m23-rebels-advance-as-drc-govt-offers-5m-reward-to-capture-rebel-leaders>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>102</sup> International crisis group, "In Eastern DR Congo, 'The Regional War is Already Happening'" 20 March 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo/dans-lest-du-congo-la-guerre-regionale-est-deja-la>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>103</sup> RGB, "RGB prohibits NGOs, FBOs, and Common-Benefit Foundations registered in Rwanda to have any kind of cooperation with the government of Belgium and its affiliated entities," 27 March 2025, <https://www.rgb.rw/updates/news-detail/public-notice-11>, accessed 3 April 2025.

On 9 October 2024, a Rwandan court sentenced YouTuber and government critic Rashid Hakuzimana to seven years in prison for allegedly denying the 1994 genocide, inciting ethnic division, and spreading false information.<sup>104</sup> Hakuzimana was arrested in 2021 and denied the charges, claiming his detention followed his criticism of President Paul Kagame's government in his YouTube videos. The judge claimed Hakuzimana's remarks, such as suggesting genocide orphans were neglected compared to officials' children, created division. He represented himself in court but refused to defend his actions. Having already served three years, he will spend four more in prison and pay a \$700 fine.

## **Somalia/ Somaliland**

### **General situation**

On 19 November 2024, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, also known as "Irro," won the presidential election in Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland.<sup>105</sup> The election had been extended for two years due to funding issues. The Somaliland National Electoral Commission reported that Abdullahi, the Waddani Party leader, secured 63.92% of the vote, defeating incumbent President Muse Bihi Abdi of the Kulmiye Party, who gathered 34.81%.

On 18 March 2025, Al-Shabaab militants launched a bomb attack targeting Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's motorcade as it departed the presidential palace en route to the airport in Mogadishu.<sup>106</sup> The armed group, which claimed responsibility via its Telegram channel, said it expressly aimed to assassinate the president. Witnesses, including soldiers and residents, confirmed the convoy was hit. While President Mohamud was confirmed safe by senior officials and a presidential adviser, the attack marks the first direct assassination attempt on him since 2014.

### **Freedom of peaceful assembly**

On 29 March 2025, authorities forcefully dispersed a peaceful protest in Mogadishu, where Somali women were demanding justice for two alarming cases of sexual violence.<sup>107</sup> Women organised the rally in response to the reported gang rape of a young Somali woman in Nairobi and the alleged forced marriage of an underage girl to an older man in Puntland. These incidents have sparked widespread public outrage across Somali communities, both at home and in the diaspora, drawing renewed attention to the pervasive violence faced by women and girls. During the demonstration, women

---

<sup>104</sup> BBC, "YouTuber and Rwandan government critic jailed," 9 October 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c153x54049eo>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>105</sup> Al Jazeera, "Opposition's Abdullahi wins presidential election in breakaway Somaliland," 19 November 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/19/oppositions-abdullahi-wins-presidential-election-in-breakaway-somaliland>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>106</sup> Reuters, "Somali militants target presidential convoy in bomb attack, president safe," 18 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-militants-target-presidential-convoy-bomb-attack-president-safe-2025-03-18/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>107</sup> SJS, "SJS and SOMWA condemn NISA attack on female journalist Shukri Aabi and cameraman Ali Hassan Guure in Mogadishu," 19 December 2024, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2024/12/19/sjs-and-somwa-condemn-nisa-attack-on-female-journalist-shukri-aabi-and-cameraman-ali-hassan-guure-in-mogadishu/>, accessed 3 April 2025

protesters marched and chanted, “*We want justice, and we do not consent to be raped,*” calling for accountability and urgent action to protect the rights and dignity of women and girls.

## **Freedom of opinion and expression**

On 3 October 2024, Somalia’s National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) officials detained *Arlaadi Media Network* reporter Luqman Sheikh Abdullahi Kerow after interrogating him about a Facebook post announcing an “upcoming appointment of a new security commander.”<sup>108</sup> They held him overnight and forced him to delete the post and issue an apology. Despite his release the following day after more than 24 hours in detention, his phone remains confiscated.

On 18 October 2024, armed personnel from NISA abducted journalist Abduqadir Mohamed Nur (Jakarta) for unknown reasons from his home in Boondheere district in Mogadishu.<sup>109</sup> They handcuffed him, confiscated his phone and laptop.

On 26 October 2024, suspected Al-Shabaab militants shot journalist Amun Abdullahi Mohamed multiple times as she walked to her farm in Abdu.<sup>110</sup> Witnesses reported that two armed men confirmed her identity before killing her. Amun had relocated to Somalia from Sweden, where she was a prominent journalist known for exposing Al-Shabaab’s recruitment efforts. Amun is the second journalist killed in Somalia in 2024, following Abdikarin Ahmed Bulhan’s murder in March 2024. This also marks the twelfth journalist killed in Somalia since 2019, making the country one of the most dangerous in the world for journalists.<sup>111</sup>

On 28 October 2024, for unclear reasons, NISA agents beat and detained *Himilo Somali TV* journalists Ibrahim Abdiweli Guled, and cameraman Yahye Mohamud Hersi for five hours while they covered the assassination of Mogadishu businessmen by Al-Shabaab in Daaru Salam district.<sup>112</sup>

On 31 October 2024, NISA agents raided *Himilo Somali TV*’s Mogadishu office, searched for its editor, Nur Abdirahman, and forced the station to delete reports. NISA officers

---

<sup>108</sup> Horn Observer, “Local journalist Luqman freed after spending a night in detention in Gedo region over Facebook post,” 05 October 2024, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/2990/Local-journalist-Luqman-freed-after-spending-a-night-in-detention-in-Gedo-region-over-Facebook-post>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>109</sup> Horn Observer, “Risaala Media’s senior journalist abducted from his home in Somalia’s capital Mogadishu,” 18 October 2024, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/3013/Risaala-Medias-senior-journalist-abducted-from-his-home-in-Somalias-capital-Mogadishu>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>110</sup> Horn Observer, “Somali-Swedish Journalist Amun Abdullahi Who Investigated al-Shabaab Recruitment Shot Dead in Somalia,” 26 October 2024, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/3022/Somali-Swedish-Journalist-Amun-Abdullahi-Who-Investigated-al-Shabaab-Recruitment-Shot-Dead-in-Somalia>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>111</sup> Horn Observers, “Somalia: End Impunity Day: SJS joins journalists in Galkayo to honor fallen colleagues and demand justice,” 03 November 2024, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/3033/Somalia-End-Impunity-Day-SJS-joins-journalists-in-Galkayo-to-honor-fallen-colleagues-and-demand-justice>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>112</sup> Horn Observer, “SJS calls on NISA to remove officers and cease threats that forced Himilo Somali TV editor into hiding,” 9 November 2024, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/3039/SJS-calls-on-NISA-to-remove-officers-and-cess-threats-that-forced-Himilo-Somali-TV-editor-into-hiding>, accessed 3 April 2025.

circulated Nur's photo and name, urging people to report his location. This pressure and harassment forced him into hiding for his safety.<sup>113</sup> Prior to this, he had reported business closures and a wave of assassinations targeting the local business community in Mogadishu by Al-Shabaab in response to business owners complying with a government order to install CCTV cameras.

On 17 December 2024, NISA officers assaulted journalist Shukri Aabi Abdi of *Risaala Media Corporation*.<sup>114</sup> They detained her cameraman, Ali Hassan Guure while covering a public protest in Mogadishu's Daljirka area. The officers confiscated Ali's camera, briefly detained him, and deleted all footage of the protest. Meanwhile, three officers violently attacked Shukri, dragging her through the street, tearing off her headscarf, kicking and beating her, and threatening her at gunpoint. A group of local women intervened to stop the assault, and Shukri was later hospitalised for her injuries. Despite the severity of the attack, no action has been taken against the officers, who remain free.

On 25 January 2025, NISA agents abducted freelance journalist Sharif Abdi after raiding his home and tracking his phone.<sup>115</sup> The agents took him to Godka Jilaow, NISA's notorious detention and torture facility, where they repeatedly interrogated him about his critical Facebook posts, particularly those criticising NISA chief Abdullahi Mohamed Ali. Sharif was held for 10 days in harsh conditions. He was detained without a court order and released on 9 February. After his release, Sharif revealed that officers had told him his detention was meant to "discipline him and make him soft so that he won't write critically in the future."

On 7 February 2025, a government-affiliated clan militia in Lower Shabelle kidnapped Omar Yusuf Mohamed, a reporter for *Nabad Somali TV*, for covering local community grievances about militia raids and detentions in the KM50 area.<sup>116</sup> The militia interrogated him about his report on the disappearance of a local clan elder, who was taken during a raid on his home on 31 January. Omar was released later the same day.

On 6 March 2025, Somalia's Minister of Information, Daud Aweys, imposed new restrictions on media outlets, journalists, and the public, prohibiting any reporting on security incidents in the capital.<sup>117</sup> The directive, issued under previously enacted laws, warned against the "misuse or fabrication of information" through all forms of media, including social media. Violators face prosecution and severe legal penalties. The minister's statement followed two security alerts from the U.S. Embassy, including a 4 March warning of potential imminent attacks targeting multiple locations in Somalia,

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> SJS, "SJS and SOMWA condemn NISA attack on female journalist Shukri Aabi and cameraman Ali Hassan Guure in Mogadishu," 19 December 2024, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2024/12/19/sjs-and-somwa-condemn-nisa-attack-on-female-journalist-shukri-aabi-and-cameraman-ali-hassan-guure-in-mogadishu/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>115</sup> SJS, "Two journalists illegally held separately by NISA and clan militia freed," 10 February 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/02/10/two-journalists-illegally-held-separately-by-nisa-and-clan-militia-freed/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> SJS, "Female journalist detained for exposing health hazard from government officials' rubbish amid media crackdown in Mogadishu," 16 March 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/03/16/female-journalist-detained-for-exposing-health-hazard-from-government-officials-rubbish-amid-media-crackdown-in-mogadishu/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

such as Mogadishu's Aden Adde International Airport. These alerts, widely reported by Somali journalists, prompted several airlines to suspend direct flights to the capital. On the same day, Banadir Regional Police Commissioner Mahdi Omar Mumin threatened to detain anyone reporting on security issues.<sup>118</sup> These threats and the media blackout have severely undermined press freedom and left the public without access to critical information about security threats. As Al-Shabaab escalates attacks near the capital, particularly in Middle and Lower Shabelle, the government's crackdown on independent reporting further endangers civilians and silences those working to inform the public.

On 15 March 2025, NISA officials arrested and later released Bahjo Abdullahi Salad, a journalist with *RTN TV*, after she reported on a viral video exposing piles of rubbish and leftover food dumped in Mogadishu's Wardhiigley district.<sup>119</sup> In her report, Bahjo raised alarm over the health risks to the local community, especially children, and urged government officials to take responsibility and address the issue. Her arrest highlights the continued harassment of journalists who expose governance failures and defend the public's right to information.

On 18 March 2025, armed police officers stormed the *Risaala Media* station in Mogadishu's Hamar Jajab district, forcibly taking it off-air and arresting five journalists without a court warrant.<sup>120</sup> The arrested media workers included Ali Ibrahim Abdullahi Suheyfa, Hamda Hassan Ahmed, Mohamed Said Nur, Liban Abdullahi Hussein, and Abdalla Sharif Ali, who were taken to Hamar Jajab police station and subjected to intense interrogation about their coverage of a bombing earlier that day. *Risaala Media* had been the first outlet to report on the attack targeting President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's convoy at the entrance to the presidential palace, which resulted in casualties. The raid came just one week after Minister of Information Daud Aweis issued a public warning threatening legal action and severe punishment against journalists who report on security failures in Mogadishu.

Journalist Mohamed Abukar Dabashe, a former reporter for *Radio Risaala*, was among several people killed in the 18 March 2025 bombing attack targeting President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's convoy in Mogadishu. Dabashe's death marks the first killing of a journalist in Somalia in 2025.<sup>121</sup>

On the same day as the bombing attack, Mogadishu police launched a targeted crackdown on journalists who had arrived at the scene to report.<sup>122</sup> 19 journalists were rounded up,

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> SJS, "Somali police shut down an independent radio station and arrested five journalists after reporting on the bombing attack on the president's convoy in Mogadishu," 18 March 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/03/18/somali-police-shut-down-an-independent-radio-station-and-arrested-five-journalists-after-reporting-on-the-bombing-attack-on-the-presidents-convoy-in-mogadishu/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>121</sup> SJS, "Somali journalist Mohamed Abukar Dabaashe killed in Al-Shabaab bomb attack in Mogadishu," 18 March 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/03/18/somali-journalist-mohamed-abukar-dabashe-killed-in-al-shabaab-bomb-attack-in-mogadishu/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>122</sup> SJS, "In a new crackdown on free press, Somali police arrest 19 journalists reporting on Al-Shabaab attack on president's convoy," 19 March 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/03/19/in-a-new-crackdown-on-free-press-somali-police-arrest-19-journalists-reporting-on-al-shabaab-attack-on-presidents-convoy/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

forced onto a police truck, and taken to Hamar Jajab police station. There, officers confiscated their equipment and deleted all footage and photographs related to the attack before releasing them.

On 26 March 2025, ten armed police officers raided the home of Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul, Secretary of Information and Human Rights at the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), allegedly harassing his family while demanding to know his whereabouts.<sup>123</sup> The raid came after Bulbul published an interview on 8 March with a former inmate who described torture and sexual violence inside the NISA underground prison, Godka Jila'ow, where government critics and journalists are often detained. Following the publication, Bulbul reported receiving threats from police and NISA officers demanding he take the interview down, a request he refused. He also reported on residents' concerns about the presence of Al-Shabaab near Mogadishu, urging authorities to act. On 24 March, Mogadishu Police Commander Mahdi Omar Mumin called Bulbul, pressuring him to stop reporting on police and security failures.

On 29 March 2025, Somali police officers arrested five journalists who were reporting on a peaceful protest demanding justice for two girls who survived sexual violence.<sup>124</sup> The officers forcefully dispersed the demonstrators and ordered the journalists to stop filming before arresting them. The journalists taken into custody were Abdirazak Haji Sidow Nor, a cameraman for *Himilo TV*; Abdullahi Abdukadir Ahmed, a reporter for *Himilo TV*; Abdirizak Abdullahi Adan, a reporter for *Radio Mustaqbal*; Abdirahman Barre Hussein, a cameraman for *Radio Mustaqbal*; and Anisa Abdiaziz Hussein, a reporter for *Himilo TV*. Police confiscated the journalists' cameras and deleted the footage at the time of the arrest. Although they were released shortly afterwards, they were warned not to cover protests in the future. Their equipment was eventually returned.

### **Somaliland**

On 16 January 2025, Somaliland police arrested journalist Shafi'i Abdi Mohamed upon his return to Hargeisa from Mogadishu. Mohamed fled Hargeisa nearly a year earlier after receiving threats from Somaliland's national intelligence agency in response to his critical reporting.<sup>125</sup> While in Mogadishu, he continued publishing investigative content on social media, exposing police corruption and amplifying public complaints against the Somaliland police commander. Authorities brought him before the Maroodi Jeh Court on 18 January, where his detention was extended for a week. On 22 January, police released Shafi'i after clan elders intervened. According to local journalists and his family, his release came with the condition that he stop criticising the police. His arrest raises serious concerns about press freedom in Somaliland, especially as President Abdirahman Irro had campaigned on a promise to protect freedom of expression. Since his election in

---

<sup>123</sup> SJS, "Intensified Crackdown on Journalists: Somali police raid home of SJS Secretary of Information Mohamed Bulbul in Mogadishu," 27 March 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/03/27/intensified-crackdown-on-journalists-mogadishu-police-raid-home-of-sjs-secretary-of-information-mohamed-bulbul-in-mogadishu/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>124</sup> SJS, "SJS and SOMWA condemn NISA attack on female journalist Shukri Aabi and cameraman Ali Hassan Guure in Mogadishu," 19 December 2024, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2024/12/19/sjs-and-somwa-condemn-nisa-attack-on-female-journalist-shukri-aabi-and-cameraman-ali-hassan-guure-in-mogadishu/>, accessed 3 April 2025

<sup>125</sup> SJS, "Somaliland releases journalist Shafi'i Shaaciye after a week in detention," 22 January 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/01/22/somaliland-releases-journalist-shafii-shaaciye-after-a-week-in-detention/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

November 2024, many journalists have returned with renewed hope. It is critical for authorities to safeguard this environment and ensure that no journalist is punished for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

On 12 February 2025, Somaliland's Ministry of Information, Culture, and National Guidance ordered the closure of privately-owned *Universal TV* following a news report that questioned the political implications of President Abdirahman Abdillahi Irro's visit to the United Arab Emirates.<sup>126</sup> In the 11 February broadcast, a journalist raised concerns about Somaliland's unrecognised status and suggested the visit could be seen as a breach of Somalia's territorial integrity. In response, the ministry accused *Universal TV* of violating prior agreements and undermining Somaliland's nationhood. Authorities ordered all cable providers to remove the station from their listings, banned the use of its logo, and directed local advertisers to cut ties. These actions reflect a broader pattern of media repression and shrinking space for independent journalism in Somaliland.

## South Sudan

### General situation

On 02 October 2024, through a presidential decree, President Salva Kiir fired General Akol Koor Kuc as head of the National Security Services (NSS).<sup>127</sup> Gen. Akol had been heading the NSS since South Sudan's independence in 2011. He has been made governor of Warrap state, where insecurity is rife. No reason was given for this. A few days later, however, his appointment was revoked.<sup>128</sup> On 27 November, security forces attempted to arrest him, triggering heavy gunfire that lasted for over an hour.<sup>129</sup> As the situation escalated, the UN issued a safety alert, urging all staff to shelter in place. The gunfight was directly linked to the attempted arrest, raising concerns about the use of excessive force and instability within the security apparatus.

In February 2025, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS) provided an overview of the human rights situation in 2024 and other key developments.<sup>130</sup> The report criticised delays and mismanagement in the political transition, which created uncertainty and instability. It raised concerns over escalating violence, insecurity, displacement, and repression, alongside worsening human rights, humanitarian, and economic crises. The report also documented widespread sexual

---

<sup>126</sup> SJS, "SJS urges Somaliland to lift Universal TV ban and calls for press freedom in Southwest State," 4 March 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/03/04/sjs-urges-somaliland-to-lift-universal-tv-ban-and-calls-for-press-freedom-in-southwest-state/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>127</sup> BBC, "South Sudan's president sacks his powerful spy chief," 3 October 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3vknnwggdzo>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>128</sup> Radio Tamazuj, "Kiir revokes appointment of ex-spy chief Akol as governor," 9 October 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/kiir-revokes-appointment-of-ex-spy-chief-akol-as-governor>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>129</sup> Reuters, "Heavy gunfire erupts in South Sudan capital of Juba," 22 November 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/heavy-gunfire-erupts-south-sudans-capital-juba-reuters-reporter-2024-11-21/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>130</sup> Reliefweb, "Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (A/HRC/58/27) (Advance unedited version)," 25 February 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc5827-advance-unedited-version>, accessed 3 April 2025.

violence, ethnic-based conflicts, extrajudicial killings, and economic exploitation, attributing them to a culture of impunity.

On 13 February 2025, DefendDefenders coordinated over 100 NGOs, urging states to adopt a strong resolution addressing South Sudan's human rights situation at the UN Human Rights Council's 58th session.<sup>131</sup> In the joint letter, the organisations called for a two-year extension of the mandate of the CHRSS. They also requested the Commission to provide regular updates to the Council, including assessments of risk factors for atrocity crimes.

On 4 March 2025, tensions abruptly rose in the capital, Juba, after four senior military officers from the main opposition group, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO), were arrested at the national army (SSPDF) headquarters.<sup>132</sup> The SSPDF is dominated by the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Government (SPLN-IG), led by President Salva Kiir. Sources linked the arrests to ongoing fighting between the SSPDF and several armed groups, including the "White Army," a Nuer militia group that has claimed control of the town of Nasir in Nasir County, Upper Nile State.<sup>133</sup> First Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar, an ethnic Nuer, has been sharing power with President Salva Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, since the country's independence, with frequent tensions and two cycles of civil war, from 2013-2015 and from 2016-2018 respectively. The White Army's advance raises concerns about ongoing instability and prospects for the resumption of large-scale, nationwide conflict.

## **Freedom of association**

Following the leadership change, the NSS released at least 16 political detainees between 7 to 11 November 2024. The agency claimed the release was part of an "accountability process" and reaffirmed its commitment to national security and the rule of law.<sup>134</sup> On 08 November, the NSS freed activist Morris Mabior Awikjok Bak, months after a Juba High Court granted him bail. Bak had spent nearly two years in detention following his forced disappearance in Kenya in February 2023.<sup>135</sup>

The NSS also released activist Michael Wetnhialic, who had been detained since March. Wetnhialic confirmed his release, stating he was freed on 07 November. Before this, the NSS unlawfully detained him three times in 2017, 2018, and 2019.<sup>136</sup> During each

---

<sup>131</sup> DefendDefenders, "South Sudan: Adopt a strong resolution extending UN investigations," 13 February 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/south-sudan-adopt-strong-resolution-un-investigations/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>132</sup> Radio Tamazuj, "Tensions rise in Juba following arrest of top SPLA-IO officers," 4 March 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/tensions-rise-in-juba-following-arrest-of-top-spla-io-officers>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>133</sup> Sudan Tribune, "South Sudan capital rocked by arrests, militia advance amid rising tensions," 4 March 2025, <https://sudantribune.com/article298142/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>134</sup> Sudans Post, "'Law-abiding' NSS releases 16 detainees" 19 November 2024, <https://www.sudanspost.com/law-abiding-nss-releases-16-detainees/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>135</sup> CIVICUS Monitor, "Threats against critics persist," 31 May 2024, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/threats-against-critics-persist/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>136</sup> HRW, "South Sudan: 'Disappeared' Critic Resurfaces," 29 April 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/29/south-sudan-disappeared-critic-resurfaces>, accessed 3 April 2025.

detention, authorities held him in poor conditions, denied him access to his family or a lawyer, and never formally charged him.

However, the NSS continues to arbitrarily detain dozens of perceived or real government critics and independent civil society voices. In a joint letter released ahead of the Human Rights Council's 58th session, over 100 NGOs denounced an agency that enjoys unchecked arbitrary powers and that is "directly under the authority and supervision of the President and [...] serves as a tool of repression."<sup>137</sup> The NGOs denounced a "culture of impunity" and the fact that NSS agents enjoy immunity from prosecution and that arrests conducted by the agency are not subjected to judicial oversight. They included a list of prominent cases.

### **Freedom of peaceful assembly**

On 20 January 2025, authorities confirmed that 16 Sudanese nationals were killed during violent protests in South Sudan.<sup>138</sup> The unrest erupted on 16 January after disturbing videos surfaced showing the bodies of South Sudanese citizens killed in Wad Madani, the capital of Sudan's Al-Jazirah State.<sup>139</sup> South Sudanese protesters, believing that Sudan's military and allied groups were responsible for the killings in Al-Jazirah, took to the streets in Juba and other cities. In retaliation, some protesters targeted Sudanese nationals, resulting in 16 deaths, several injuries, and the looting and vandalism of Sudanese-owned shops. The protests were met with a heavy police response, leading to multiple arrests. The South Sudanese police intervened, rescuing several Sudanese nationals and providing them shelter in various police stations.<sup>140</sup> Authorities enforced a nationwide curfew from 6 am to 6 pm on 17 January,<sup>141</sup> which remained in place until its lifting on 27 January.<sup>142</sup>

### **Freedom of opinion and expression**

On 28 November 2024, NSS officers detained Emmanuel Monychol Akop, editor-in-chief of *The Dawn Newspaper*, without presenting an arrest warrant or disclosing the

---

<sup>137</sup> DefendDefenders, "South Sudan: Adopt a strong resolution extending UN investigations," 13 February 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/south-sudan-adopt-strong-resolution-un-investigations/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>138</sup> Reuters, "South Sudan says 16 Sudanese nationals killed in last week's unrest," 20 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-sudan-says-16-sudanese-nationals-killed-last-weeks-unrest-2025-01-20/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>139</sup> Reuters, "South Sudan imposes curfew after Sudan killings trigger riots," 17 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-sudan-imposes-curfew-after-sudan-killings-trigger-riots-2025-01-17/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>140</sup> Anadolu Agency, "16 Sudanese nationals killed in protests in South Sudan," 21 January 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/16-sudanese-nationals-killed-in-protests-in-south-sudan-police/3456971>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>141</sup> Associated Press, "South Sudan imposes nationwide overnight curfew to curb violence targeting Sudanese traders," 18 January 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-violence-sudan-curfew-bc982d7eba3398f01928a085c183f6b7>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>142</sup> Reuters, "South Sudan lifts nationwide curfew imposed after riots over Sudan killings," 27 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-sudan-lifts-nationwide-curfew-imposed-after-riots-over-sudan-killings-2025-01-27/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

charges.<sup>143</sup> NSS agents visited *The Dawn* office in Juba, held a meeting with Akop, and then took him into custody. Authorities have denied Akop's family any contact, claiming visits will only be allowed after complete investigations.<sup>144</sup> They have provided no further details, and as of early March 2025, Akop remained in incommunicado detention. The Union of Journalists of South Sudan (UJOSS) has condemned the detention, calling for his immediate release and respect for press freedom.<sup>145</sup>

On 22 January, South Sudan's National Communication Authority ordered all internet service providers to block access to social media for at least 30 days and up to 90 days.<sup>146</sup> The regulator claimed the suspension aimed to curb the spread of videos showing the killings of South Sudanese nationals in Sudan, which had sparked violent protests and retaliatory attacks on Sudanese nationals in South Sudan. Amnesty International criticised the order as arbitrary and inconsistent with international human rights standards.<sup>147</sup> The organisation warned that blanket social media bans undermine freedom of information, expression, association, and peaceful assembly rights protected under South Sudan's Constitution and international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Amnesty also cautioned that such restrictions set a dangerous precedent, especially given past instances where authorities blocked news websites and disrupted internet access. Authorities eventually lifted the ban after three days.

## **Sudan**

### **General situation**

On 18 February 2025, the UN Human Rights Office issued a report detailing widespread and egregious human rights violations and abuses committed in Sudan since the outbreak of conflict in April 2023.<sup>148</sup> The report paints a harrowing picture of a country engulfed in violence, marked by deliberate attacks on civilians and a systematic erosion of fundamental rights. The report documents repeated assaults on densely populated urban areas and IDP camps. Armed actors have also targeted health facilities, markets, and schools, facilities that are protected under international humanitarian law. It further exposes ethnically motivated summary executions, suggesting a pattern of violence that may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. Since the conflict erupted nearly

---

<sup>143</sup> Radio Tamazuj, "South Sudan security detains The Dawn editor," 30 November 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/south-sudan-security-detains-the-dawn-editor>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>144</sup> CPJ, "South Sudan editor Emmanuel Monychol Akop detained without charge by intelligence agents," 19 December 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/12/south-sudan-editor-emmanuel-monychol-akop-detained-without-charge-by-intelligence-agents/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>145</sup> Radio Tamazuj, "Detained The Dawn Editor Monychol Akop's whereabouts remain unknown," 16 December 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/detained-the-dawn-editor-monychol-akops-whereabouts-remain-unknown>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>146</sup> CPJ, "South Sudan blocks social media access amid unrest," 24 January 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/01/south-sudan-blocks-social-media-access-amid-unrest/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>147</sup> Amnesty International, "South Sudan: Authorities must reverse blanket ban on social media and investigate attacks on civilians," 25 January 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr65/8600/2025/en/>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>148</sup> OHCHR, "Sudan: Entrenched impunity fuelling gross human rights violations and abuses," 18 February 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/sudan-entrenched-impunity-fuelling-gross-human-rights-violations-and-abuses>, accessed 8 April 2025.

two years ago, Sudan has witnessed the world's largest displacement crisis. Millions have been forced to flee their homes, while famine-like conditions have emerged in at least five regions. The UN estimates that half of Sudan's population now faces acute food insecurity, with humanitarian access severely restricted. UN investigators recorded a sustained campaign of attacks on medical infrastructure, compounding an already dire humanitarian crisis.<sup>149</sup>

From April 2023 to November 2024, the UN verified at least 120 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>150</sup> However, the accurate scale is likely far higher, as survivors face significant barriers to reporting, including the collapse of healthcare and judicial systems, fear of reprisals, and pervasive stigma. The report also highlights a disturbing increase in enforced disappearances and a broad assault on civic space. Authorities and armed groups have systematically targeted journalists and HRDs. At least 12 journalists have been killed, two while in detention, and 31 others arbitrarily detained, among them four women. These actions reflect an orchestrated effort to silence dissent and suppress the flow of information.

On 27 March 2025, SAF reclaimed control of Khartoum from the RSF, marking a significant shift in the country's brutal power struggle.<sup>151</sup> While the SAF asserts authority over large parts of Sudan, the RSF remains deeply entrenched in nearly all of Darfur. After a string of military defeats, the RSF withdrew from key positions in the capital, a move its commander, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), described as a tactical retreat to Omdurman. Analysts warn that the conflict's frontlines may shift to Darfur, where the RSF seeks to entrench its authority and establish a parallel administration. In a defiant audio message, Hemedti rejected any prospect of dialogue with the army, vowing to return to Khartoum "stronger, more powerful and victorious," and affirming that his forces would continue to fight using "the language of arms."<sup>152</sup>

On 12 April 2025, the RSF launched a deadly assault on Zamzam IDP Camp in North Darfur, killing six humanitarian workers.<sup>153</sup> The victims were Dr Mahmoud Babiker, Ali Musa Issa, Mohamed Ahmed Hashim, Martyr Adam Babiker, Mutwakil (Kola), and Abu Asha. The deliberate targeting of humanitarian personnel and civilians breached international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions, amounting to a war crime that demands urgent international accountability. The attack intensified already dire conditions in Zamzam Camp, which shelters hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people and has faced ongoing sieges and violent assaults, cutting off access to essential food, water, and medical care.

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> CNN, "Sudan's army has captured the capital. Is it a turning point in the devastating conflict?" 27 March 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/03/27/africa/sudans-army-captures-khartoum-from-rsf-intl/index.html>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>152</sup> Al Jazeera, "Sudan's RSF confirms retreat from Khartoum, eyes 'stronger' return," 30 March 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/30/sudans-rsf-confirms-retreat-from-khartoum-eyes-stronger-return>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>153</sup> Darfur Network for Human Rights, "Humanitarian Workers Killed in Zamzam Camp North Darfur," 12 April 2025, <https://dnhr.org/2025/04/12/humanitarian-workers-killed-in-zamzam-camp-northdarfur/>, accessed 22 April 2025.

## Freedom of opinion and expression

On 8 December 2024, RSF soldiers killed journalist Hanan Adam, a correspondent for the local Sudanese Communist Party-affiliated newspaper *al-Midan*, and her brother, Youssef Adam, at their home in the village of Wad Al-Asha in the east-central al-Gezira state.<sup>154</sup>

On 13 January 2025, prominent Sudanese journalist Yahya Hamad Fadlallah died at Al Nou Hospital in Omdurman, just three days after SAF forces released him from custody in critical condition.<sup>155</sup> SAF members had arrested Fadlallah and his son at their home in Khartoum on 11 December 2024, accused him without evidence of collaborating with the RSF, and subjected him to torture and prolonged denial of medical care for his diabetes. Authorities failed to provide treatment even as his condition deteriorated in detention.

Sudan remains one of the deadliest countries in the world for journalists since war erupted between the SAF and the RSF in April 2023.<sup>156</sup> On 21 March 2025, a drone strike launched by the RSF on the Republican Palace in central Khartoum killed four *Sudan National Television* staff and two war correspondents just hours after the Sudanese army declared the site recaptured. The television crew, accompanied by military media, had arrived to document what the army described as the “liberation” of the palace following intense clashes. Among the killed were producer-director Farouk Ahmed Mohamed Al-Zaher, cameraman Magdy Abdel-Rahman, driver Wajh Jaafar Onour, and director Ibrahim Madawi, who succumbed to injuries sustained in the attack. Military sources confirmed the RSF deployed suicide drones after its forces were expelled from the palace, targeting soldiers and media personnel at the scene.<sup>157</sup> The attack also claimed the lives of Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Ibrahim and Captain Imad al-Din Hassan.

## Tanzania

### General situation

On 17 October 2024, UN human rights experts raised alarm over the Tanzanian government’s escalating repression of opposition political parties, civil society groups, journalists, Indigenous peoples, and HRDs in the run-up to the November 2024 local elections and the October 2025 presidential poll.<sup>158</sup> Authorities used harassment,

---

<sup>154</sup> CPJ, “Rapid Support Forces kill Sudanese journalist Hanan Adam and brother,” 12 December 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/12/rapid-support-forces-kill-sudanese-journalist-hanan-adam-and-brother/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>155</sup> CPJ, “Sudanese journalist Yahya Hamad Fadlallah dies after army arrest,” 22 January 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/01/sudanese-journalist-yahya-hamad-fadlallah-dies-after-army-arrest/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>156</sup> CPJ, “Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces kill 3 state TV journalists and their driver in drone strike,” 21 March 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/03/sudans-rapid-support-forces-kill-3-state-tv-journalists-and-their-driver-in-drone-strike/#:~:text=Sudan%20remains%20one%20of%20the,via%20Telegram%20were%20not%20return%20ed>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>157</sup> Sudan Tribune, “Four Sudanese TV crew members and war correspondents killed in a march on the presidential palace,” 21 March 2025, <https://sudantribune.net/article298861/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>158</sup> OHCHR, “Tanzania: Experts call for urgent action amid crackdown on civil society ahead of elections,” 17 October 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/tanzania-experts-call-urgent-action-amid-crackdown-civil-society-ahead>, accessed 8 April 2025.

arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and even unlawful killings to suppress opposition activity, especially during voter registration and public rallies. The experts highlighted how these violations undermined democratic participation and were part of a broader strategy to silence dissent and restrict civic space. They also condemned the government's suspension of media licenses and restriction of access to social media platforms in retaliation for human rights advocacy, urging immediate restoration of both.

Officials reportedly weaponised the NGO Act to deregister CSOs and, on 2 August 2024, delisted villages in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area from voter registers, actions that sparked peaceful protests by the Indigenous Maasai, who viewed this as a threat to their ancestral lands.<sup>159</sup> The Arusha High Court's decision on 22 August to suspend this notice, followed by reinstatement orders in September, marked a critical step toward restoring political rights and inclusion. The experts urged the government to implement the Court's rulings fully, respect the Maasai's right to free and informed participation, and engage in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous leaders.

In a landmark victory for the rights of persons with albinism (PWAs), the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights held the United Republic of Tanzania accountable for serious human rights violations in the case of *Centre for Human Rights and Others v. United Republic of Tanzania* (Application No. 019/2018).<sup>160</sup> The Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), the Centre for Human Rights (CHR) at the University of Pretoria, and the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) jointly brought the case, exposing Tanzania's failure to prevent the killings, abductions, and systemic discrimination against PWAs. The Court found that the Tanzanian government violated multiple rights, including the rights to life, dignity, health, education, and protection from torture and discrimination, particularly for children with albinism. In response, the Court ordered the government to pay reparations, reform discriminatory laws, strengthen shelters, and launch public awareness campaigns. This judgment not only affirms the dignity and rights of PWAs but also sets a powerful precedent, reinforcing states' obligations under the African Charter to protect marginalised groups from violence and exclusion.

The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights granted IHRDA and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (RFK Human Rights) permission to intervene as *amici curiae* (Latin for "friends of the court" independent experts who assist by offering specialised legal insight) in the case of *Ado Shaibu and 5 Others v. United Republic of Tanzania* (Application 046/2020).<sup>161</sup> The applicants contend that the Tanzanian government violated electoral rights during the 2020 general elections by orchestrating and enabling actions that suppressed political participation. They assert that state actors, including the National Electoral Commission, security forces, and state-controlled media, deliberately restricted

---

<sup>159</sup> Ibid

<sup>160</sup> IHRDA, "African Court rules in favour of Persons with Albinism, orders Tanzania to take concrete action," 5 February 2025, <https://www.ihrda.org/2025/02/african-court-rules-in-favour-of-persons-with-albinism-orders-tanzania-to-take-concrete-action/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>161</sup> Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, "African Court admits RFK Human Rights and IHRDA as amici curiae in case on electoral rights in Tanzania," 20 March 2025, <https://rfkhumanrights.org/press/african-court-admits-rfk-human-rights-and-ihrda-as-amici-curiae-in-case-on-electoral-rights-in-tanzania/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

civic and political space, mainly targeting opposition parties and independent voices. On 19 March 2025, the Court issued a decision allowing the amici to submit expert legal analysis on electoral rights and civic space, particularly in Tanzania's disputed 2020 general elections.

On 20 January 2025, Tanzania's ruling party, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM), unanimously nominated President Samia Suluhu Hassan as its presidential candidate for the upcoming general elections.<sup>162</sup> Two days later, on 22 January, the main opposition party, CHADEMA, elected prominent politician Tundu Lissu as its new chairman, marking a significant shift in the country's political landscape. Lissu won the leadership contest with 513 votes (51.5%), narrowly defeating long-serving party leader Freeman Mbowe, who secured 482 votes (48.3%).

### **Freedom of association**

On 9 April 2025, police officers arrested Tundu Lissu, leader of Tanzania's main opposition party, CHADEMA, after holding a political rally in Mbinga town, southwest of Tanzania.<sup>163</sup> Police used excessive force, including firing teargas and shooting in the air to disperse his supporters who gathered around during the arrest. The following day, authorities charged Lissu with treason, a non-bailable offence, over a social media post he published on 3 April calling for a boycott of the upcoming elections, which he alleged would be rigged.<sup>164</sup> The state also charged him three counts under Tanzania's cybercrime laws for allegedly publishing false information. In a YouTube video posted on 3 April, Lissu claimed that police had participated in electoral malpractice on orders from the president following the November 2024 local elections. He also alleged that the judiciary lacks independence and operates under pressure from the ruling party. Authorities denied Lissu the right to enter a plea on the treason charge, but he pleaded not guilty to the publication-related offence and is scheduled to appear in Court again on 24 April.<sup>165</sup> His lawyer, Rugemeleza Nshala, denounced the charges as politically motivated, pointing to a broader crackdown on dissent ahead of Tanzania's 2025 general elections.

On 12 April 2025, Tanzania's Electoral Commission disqualified the main opposition party, CHADEMA, from participating in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2025.<sup>166</sup> Ramadhani Kailima, the Commission's director of elections, claimed that CHADEMA failed to sign a mandatory code of conduct by the deadline, effectively barring it from all electoral processes, including by-elections, until

---

<sup>162</sup> BBC, "Fiery Tanzanian politician Tundu Lissu elected to head opposition party," 22 January 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8r5epkj013o>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>163</sup> Anadolu Agency, "Tanzania arrests prominent opposition politician amid crackdown ahead of elections," 10 April, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/tanzania-arrests-prominent-opposition-politician-amid-crackdown-ahead-of-elections/3533440>, accessed 13 April 2025.

<sup>164</sup> Amnesty International, "Tanzania: Stop repression of opposition leaders and immediately release Tundu Lissu," 11 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/tanzania-stop-repression-of-opposition-leaders-and-immediately-release-tundu-lissu/>, accessed 13 April 2025.

<sup>165</sup> Al Jazeera, "Tanzania opposition party leader Tundu Lissu charged with treason," 10 April 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/10/tanzania-opposition-party-leader-tundu-lissu-charged-with-treason>, accessed 13 April 2025.

<sup>166</sup> Reuters, "Tanzania's top opposition party disqualified from polls, election commission says," 12 April 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tanzania-election-official-says-top-opposition-party-disqualified-polls-2025-04-12/>, accessed 13 April 2025.

2030. The exclusion of CHADEMA has sparked widespread outrage among HRDs and opposition voices, who condemned the move as part of an escalating crackdown on political dissent under President Samia Suluhu Hassan's administration. Civil society actors continue to raise alarms over patterns of repression, including enforced disappearances and unlawful killings targeting critics of the government.

## Freedom of opinion and expression

On 2 October 2024, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) issued a 30-day suspension order for *Mwananchi Communications Limited's* (MCL) online publications, affecting the websites and social media pages of its newspapers, the English-language daily *The Citizen*, the Swahili-language *Mwananchi*, and the sports-focused *Mwanaspoti*.<sup>167</sup> Prior to this, *The Citizen* had published an animated video on social media featuring a character resembling President Samia Suluhu Hassan, watching television coverage of reported killings and abductions of government critics.<sup>168</sup> This action was part of a broader trend of restricting press freedom and narrowing civic space ahead of the 27 November 2024 local and 2025 presidential and parliamentary elections.

On 9 October 2024, the TCRA targeted YouTube-based *Jambo TV* for airing claims by opposition figure Tundu Lissu and journalist Erick Kabendera that telecom companies Tigo and Vodacom Tanzania shared their data with the government.<sup>169</sup> These claims included Tigo sharing Lissu's location data before a 2017 assassination attempt and Vodacom's involvement in Kabendera's 2019 arrest. The TCRA ordered *Jambo TV* to submit a written defence and appear before its Content Committee on 17 October 2024.

On 12 January 2025, Tanzanian activist Maria Sarungi Tsehai was abducted outside a Nairobi salon in broad daylight. She reported that unidentified men, claiming to be police officers, pulled her from a taxi around 3 p.m. and forced her into a van.<sup>170</sup> They blindfolded, choked, and restrained her with handcuffs, pinning her down by sitting on her feet. Her abductors confiscated her phones and repeatedly demanded access to her social media accounts, which she refused to provide. Hours later, they released her in the city's outskirts but kept her devices. Maria believes the abduction was an attempt to access her digital communications, likely linked to her activism and criticism of the Tanzanian government. Maria fled Tanzania in 2020 after facing escalating threats under the late President John Magufuli's administration.<sup>171</sup> In recent months, she had raised alarms about her safety, citing incidents of unknown individuals searching for her at her residence.

## Uganda

### General situation

---

<sup>167</sup> CPJ, "Tanzania's regulator bans media outlets as journalists harassed," 15 October 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/10/tanzanias-regulator-bans-media-outlets-as-journalists-harassed/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> YouTube, "The Nation: Tanzanian activist Maria Sarungi recounts her abduction in Nairobi," 13 January 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgMGuYAEZRA>, accessed 3 April 2025.

<sup>171</sup> BBC, "'Manhandled and choked' - Tanzanian activist recounts abduction," 13 January 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd7dxz48e01o>, accessed 3 April 2025.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights condemned Uganda's escalating repression of EHRDs, citing arbitrary arrests, judicial harassment, and physical violence, particularly against activists opposing oil projects.<sup>172</sup> During its 81st Ordinary Session, held from 17 October to 6 November 2024, the Commission adopted Resolution ACHPR/Res.613 (LXXXI) 2024, denouncing the Ugandan government's crackdown on peaceful protestors. The resolution highlighted a series of arrests since 2023, including the detention of 47 anti- EACOP student activists, 21 protestors delivering a fossil fuel petition, and several demonstrators outside the Chinese Embassy. The Commission also condemned the enforced disappearance of Stephen Kwikiriza and the brutal beating of environmental defender Bob Barigya by police. The Commission urged Uganda to uphold fundamental rights, end the persecution of EHRDs, drop all charges against peaceful protestors, and investigate human rights violations. It also called for Uganda to ratify the International Convention on Enforced Disappearances and align its laws with international human rights standards.

On 12 December 2024, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF), and the Civic Response on Environment and Development (CRED) released a report titled "Heated: Human Rights, Frontline Communities, and Oil in Uganda."<sup>173</sup> The report builds on community-based impact assessments of the Lake Albert oil extraction and development project, covering the Tilenga and Kingfisher oil sites and the EACOP. It documents land rights violations, labour rights abuses, restrictions on freedom of assembly, SGBV, and attacks on HRDs. At the Kingfisher site, the report uncovered several cases of sexual exploitation, where military personnel coerced women into sex in exchange for selling fish freely. At the same time, company staff promised jobs in return for sexual favours. The Ugandan army has also carried out repeated arrests, extortion, and mistreatment of community members, enforcing harsh fishing restrictions that have undermined the area's main livelihood and instilled fear among residents. The findings reinforce long-standing concerns about the project's environmental and human rights impacts.

## **Freedom of association**

On 16 November 2024, Ugandan authorities abducted opposition leader Dr. Kizza Besigye in Nairobi, Kenya, while he attended a book launch.<sup>174</sup> He later appeared in a Ugandan military court. The court charged Besigye with "soliciting for logistical support and identifying military targets in Uganda" and possessing Ugandan military weapons. On 21 February 2025, Besigye was accused of treason in a civilian court after transferring

---

<sup>172</sup> ACHPR, "RESOLUTION ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WORKING ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN UGANDA. ACHPR/Res.613 (LXXXI) 2024," 14 November 2024, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/613-human-rights-defenders-working-environmental-issues-uganda-achpres613>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>173</sup> FIDH, "Oil in Uganda: Serious human rights abuses and escalating threats as project development enters new phase" 12 December 2024, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/business-human-rights-environment/business-and-human-rights/oil-uganda-human-rights-eacop-kingfisher-tilenga-report-2024>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>174</sup> OHCHR, "Comment by UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk on abduction of Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye," 21 November 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/comment-un-human-rights-chief-volker-turk-abduction-ugandan-opposition>, accessed 8 April 2025.

his case from a military tribunal.<sup>175</sup> Treason carries a potential death penalty in Uganda. A Supreme Court ruling declared military trials for civilians unconstitutional, leading to his case's transfer. He is accused of plotting to overthrow the government through meetings abroad and seeking military and financial support. Besigye, alongside two co-accused, did not enter a plea, as treason charges must be heard in a higher court. He recently ended a hunger strike, protesting his detention. His request for medical transfer was denied, and he remains in custody while investigations continue.

On 11 April 2025, High Court Judge Rosette Comfort Kania denied bail to opposition leader Dr Kizza Besigye and his aide Hajj Obeid Lutale, citing the gravity of the charges and concerns over possible interference with investigations.<sup>176</sup> This decision came despite the two meeting standard bail conditions and presenting credible sureties.

On 7 January 2025, security officers assaulted and arrested human rights lawyer Eron Kiiza as he attempted to access a military courtroom where he was representing opposition leader Dr Kizza Besigye and his aide Haji Obeid Lutale.<sup>177</sup> The General Court Martial convicted Kiiza of contempt of court and sentenced him to nine months in Kitalya Prison, where he was transferred the same day. His colleagues, who visited him in detention, reported that he had been tortured and denied basic legal safeguards. On 4 April 2025, the High Court in Kampala granted Kiiza a cash bail of 20 million shillings as he appeals the conviction.<sup>178</sup>

On 18 February 2025, opposition leaders gave the government a 48-hour deadline to release all political prisoners, including Dr Kizza Besigye, whose health is reportedly deteriorating in Luzira Prison.<sup>179</sup> The ultimatum followed an unsuccessful attempt by opposition figures to visit Besigye, raising serious concerns about his well-being and access to medical care. Leaders from several political parties, including National Unity Platform (NUP) President Robert Kyagulanyi also known as Bobi Wine, Alliance for National Transformation founder Maj Gen Mugisha Muntu, Uganda People's Congress President Jimmy Akena, and People's Front for Freedom leader Erias Lukwago, met at the NUP headquarters in Kavule to chart a way forward. They condemned what they described as the government's sustained persecution of political opponents and warned of increased action if Besigye and other detainees were not released within the set timeframe. They stressed that unlawful detention, denial of access to family and legal counsel, and neglect of medical needs amount to serious violations of human rights and democratic principles.

---

<sup>175</sup> BBC, "Veteran Ugandan politician charged with treason," 21 February 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy4vdkmpg04o>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>176</sup> The Standard, "Uganda court denies bail for opposition leader Kizza Besigye," 11 April 2025, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/health/amp/africa/article/2001516234/uganda-court-denies-bail-for-opposition-leader-kizza-besigye>, accessed 13 April 2025.

<sup>177</sup> The Guardian, "Lawyer for Ugandan opposition politician arrested and tortured," 16 January 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/16/lawyer-for-ugandan-opposition-politician-arrested-and-tortured-eron-kiiza-kizza-besigye-yoweri-museveni>, accessed 22 April 2025.

<sup>178</sup> NTV, "High court grants Eron Kiiza 20 Million shilling bail after contempt conviction appeal," 4 April 2025, <https://www.ntv.co.ug/ug/news/national/high-court-grants-eron-kiiza-20-million-shilling-bail-after-contempt-conviction-appeal-4991026>, accessed 22 April 2025.

<sup>179</sup> Nile Post, "Opposition Issues 48-Hour Ultimatum Over Besigye Detention," 18 February 2025, <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/243469/opposition-issues-48-hour-ultimatum-over-besigye-detention>, accessed 8 April 2025.

On 18 February 2025, shortly after opposition leaders gave the government a 48-hour ultimatum to release Dr Kizza Besigye, heavily armed men believed to be Ugandan security operatives abducted Fred Nyanzi Ssentamu, Head of Mobilisation for the NUP party.<sup>180</sup> They allegedly forced him into a vehicle and held him incommunicado for four days, during which he endured torture. NUP President Bobi Wine, claimed that operatives from the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence released Nyanzi and abandoned him near his home.<sup>181</sup>

In a statement, NUP President Bobi Wine disclosed that Micheal Mpalanyi, a party member, was abducted by armed men driving a white Toyota on 18 March 2025 in Matugga.<sup>182</sup> He condemned the ongoing detention of Mpalanyi and another supporter by security operatives. The party demanded their immediate release and raised alarm over what it described as a systematic campaign of repression. NUP accused the government of orchestrating illegal arrests, enforced disappearances, and acts of torture against its members, highlighting a continued assault on civil liberties and political freedoms in Uganda.

On 18 March 2025, the Uganda Police Force raided the NUP offices in Kavule and Kamwokya, claiming to investigate reports of unauthorised military drills.<sup>183</sup> The operation, which was carried out with other security agencies, followed a public parade where NUP supporters wore red uniforms and berets. NUP President Bobi Wine condemned the raid and accused security forces of planting evidence and sealing off surrounding roads. He further alleged that shortly after a meeting with over 40 elders from the Teso subregion, military operatives abducted the attendees, including elderly individuals, and later abandoned them at Wandegaya Police Station. The party denounced the operation as a targeted act of political intimidation and a violation of the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

### **Freedom of peaceful assembly**

On 11 November 2024, police officers arrested five environmental activists who staged a protest against the destruction of the Lwera wetland by alleged Chinese investors.<sup>184</sup> The demonstrators, affiliated with Weka-Afri Sustainable Biodiversity and Food Security Foundation, were intercepted near Kitgum House on Jinja Road while marching under

---

<sup>180</sup> The Independent, "BOBI WINE: NUP's Head of Mobilisation 'chairman' Nyanzi abducted," 17 February 2025, <https://www.independent.co.ug/bobi-wine-nups-head-of-mobilisation-chairman-nyanzi-abducted/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>181</sup> Nile Post, "Nyanzi reappears after days of being missing," 21 February 2025, <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/244256/nyanzi-reappears-after-days-of-being-missing>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>182</sup> Nile Post, "NUP demands release of missing supporters, alleges abductions by security agencies," 8 April 2025, <https://nilepost.co.ug/bobi/252476/nup-demands-release-of-missing-supporters-alleges-abductions-by-security-agencies>, accessed 13 April 2025.

<sup>183</sup> CHIMP Reports, "Police Raid NUP Headquarters, Nyanzi Released," 21 February 2025, <https://chimpreports.com/police-raid-nup-headquarters-nyanzi-released/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>184</sup> Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, "Uganda: Five environmental activists arrested for protesting against destruction of wetlands to pave way for rice cultivation by Chinese investors," 10 October 2024, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/uganda-five-environmental-activists-arrested-for-protesting-against-the-destruction-of-wetlands-by-alleged-chinese-investors/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

the banner “Save Lwera Wetland from Destruction.” Holding placards and chanting slogans, the activists condemned the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) for failing to protect Uganda’s wetlands. The protest escalated into running battles with police, leading to the arrest of five individuals now detained at Central police station Kampala.

Separately, on 11 November 2024, police arrested 15 activists protesting Uganda’s ongoing oil developments and charged them with common nuisance.<sup>185</sup> The young Ugandans protested EACOP, citing threats to the environment and local livelihoods. Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson Patrick Onyango confirmed the arrests.

Similarly, authorities in Kampala arrested 11 environmentalists on 26 February 2025 during a protest at the European Union (EU) Mission against the EACOP.<sup>186</sup> The protesters, members of the Students Against EACOP Uganda group, sought to deliver a petition to the head of the EU delegation, urging the bloc to take action against the controversial \$5 billion project. Police charged the activists with “common nuisance” and remanded them to Luzira Prison. Their demonstration aimed to highlight the environmental and social risks associated with EACOP, including threats to biodiversity, displacement of communities, and long-term ecological damage.

### **Freedom of opinion and expression**

On 26 February 2025, two masked officers from Uganda’s Joint Anti-Terrorist Task Force (JAT) violently attacked Ibrahim Miracle, a journalist with *Christian broadcaster Top TV*, as he covered the arrest and beating of an opposition candidate ahead of a parliamentary by-election in Kampala.<sup>187</sup> One of the officers forcefully seized his camera and ordered him to stop filming. During the attack, Miracle sustained serious facial injuries, including a fractured orbital bone, and required hospitalisation and two surgeries. The assault sparked outrage, prompting lawmakers to raise the issue in Parliament the following day. In response, Uganda’s Trade Minister David Bahati pledged a government investigation. The Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson Luke Owoyesigire also confirmed that authorities were aware of the case and were waiting to obtain Miracle’s statement.

On 3 March 2025, police officers assaulted *Nation Media Group (NMG)* camera operator Stephen Kibwiika while he was covering the Kawempe North by-election near the NUP headquarters.<sup>188</sup> Despite clearly identifying himself with a “press” vest, officers struck him with batons, causing severe ankle injuries that left him unable to walk properly for days. Similarly, on 4 March 2024, around eight officers forcibly restrained *NMG* reporter

---

<sup>185</sup> Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, “Uganda: 15 activists arrested over anti-EACOP protest; TotalEnergies responded, CNOOC and UNOC did not,” 11 November 2024, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/uganda-15-activists-arrested-over-anti-eacop-protest-totalenergies-responded-cnooc-and-unoc-did-not/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>186</sup> Monitor, “11 anti-EACOP protesters charged with common nuisance after protest at EU Mission,” 27 February 2025, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/11-anti-eacop-protesters-charged-with-common-nuisance-after-protest-at-eu-mission-4943894>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>187</sup> CPJ, “Ugandan anti-terrorism officers brutally assault journalist,” 4 March 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/03/ugandan-anti-terrorism-officers-brutally-assault-journalist/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>188</sup> HRNJ-Uganda, “Security Operatives Attack NTV Uganda Journalists Covering Elections,” 6 March 2025, <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10136>, accessed 8 April 2025.

Steven Mbidde and dragged him to the ground as he broadcasted live coverage of the detention of NUP supporters. Kibwiika denounced the officers' actions as a calculated attempt to silence the press and restrict the flow of information. He argued that the security forces deliberately forced journalists to delete footage or surrender their equipment, undermined media freedom, and denied the public its right to access independent and accurate reporting. These incidents reflect an alarming disregard for press freedom and a broader pattern of repression targeting journalists in Uganda.

On 13 March 2025, security forces violently assaulted and intimidated at least 12 journalists who were reporting on the Kawempe North by-election in Uganda.<sup>189</sup> The coordinated attacks targeted members of the press carrying out their professional duties and represented a serious violation of press freedom and fundamental human rights. Masked soldiers beat *New Vision* reporter Ibrahim Ruhweza using batons and gun butts. They then detained him and his colleague, Isaac Nuwagaba, in an unmarked vehicle. During their detention, soldiers forced them to delete all video footage and photographs.<sup>190</sup> These actions not only violated their right to work but also obstructed the public's access to truthful reporting on the electoral process. At a polling station, several soldiers physically assaulted Hasifah Nanvuma, a reporter with *Spark TV* under *NMG*.<sup>191</sup> They struck her repeatedly on the back and arms as she reported live from the scene. Nanvuma was wearing a vest clearly labelled "press," yet this identification did not prevent the attack.

Security personnel detained photojournalist Abubaker Lubowa, camera operator Denis Kabugo, and reporter Raymond Tamale, also with *NMG*.<sup>192</sup> The soldiers held them in an unmarked vehicle for four hours. Lubowa later reported that the soldiers blindfolded and beat them on the head, arms, legs, and ribs. He also stated that the officers confiscated their phones and watches and destroyed their cameras. Journalists working for *NBS Television* also suffered violent attacks.<sup>193</sup> Security forces assaulted photojournalist Francis Isano, camera operator Hassan Wasswa, and reporter Hakim Wampamba. Isano sustained serious injuries that required hospitalisation. He remained under medical care for several days following the assault. In another disturbing incident, unknown individuals attacked *Uganda Broadcasting Corporation's* camera operator, Jahiem Jamil Ssekajja, while he was filming at a polling station.<sup>194</sup> They struck him with electrical wires, leaving visible welts on his body. Ssekajja later developed a fever due to his injuries.

These targeted assaults demonstrate a deliberate attempt to silence independent media and intimidate journalists from covering electoral events. Such actions violate Uganda's obligations under international human rights law, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to liberty and security of person, and the right to be free from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. In a brief statement, acting military spokesperson Chris Magezi announced that the armed forces had opened investigations into the alleged

---

<sup>189</sup> HRNJ-Uganda, "Brutal Crackdown: Security Forces Assault Journalists Covering Kawempe North By-Election," 13 March 2025, <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10156>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>190</sup> CPJ, "Troubling crackdown on Ugandan journalists ahead of 2026 elections," 27 March 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/03/troubling-crackdown-on-ugandan-journalists-ahead-of-2026-elections/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

assaults and confiscation of journalists' equipment.<sup>195</sup> However, journalists and rights defenders continue to express concern over systemic impunity for security forces accused of violating press freedoms.

---

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.