



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

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**BANJUL, THE GAMBIA,
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DefendDefenders' Bi-Annual Report to the ACHPR**

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Executive Summary

DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) welcomes the opportunity offered by the 83rd 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 May to October 2025.

The East and Horn of Africa experienced deepening political repression, armed conflict, and the systematic closure of civic space. Ongoing wars in Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia have driven mass displacement and humanitarian crises, with civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. Electoral processes across the region have entrenched authoritarianism rather than opened space for democratic participation. Opposition figures were surveilled, harassed, and in some cases charged with treason widely viewed as a politically motivated tactic to silence dissent.

Civic space across the region remains either restricted or completely closed, with states increasingly relying on legal, extrajudicial, and cross-border methods to suppress dissent. Governments are actively dismantling legal protections for civil and political rights through regressive legislative reforms. Uganda reintroduced military trials for civilians through a legal amendment despite the Supreme Court ruling such trials unconstitutional earlier in the year. In Kenya, the introduction of the Public Order Amendment Bill threatens the right to peaceful assembly. Ethiopia's proposed amendments to the civil society law, alongside recent legislative changes on media and anti-money laundering, have raised fears of greater state control over non-governmental actors. Restrictions on freedom of expression are widespread. According to the 2025 Press Freedom Index, seven countries in the region; Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, and Somalia, rank in the bottom quarter globally. 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 remains deeply concerning as the country enters an extended electoral period ahead of the 2027 presidential elections. Authorities intensified restrictions on civic and political freedoms, with growing reports of enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture, and other serious violations. Security forces and the National Intelligence Service (SNR) were repeatedly implicated in the disappearance of opposition supporters, particularly members of the National Council for Liberty (CNL), many of whom remain unaccounted for. The *Imbonerakure* youth group continued to act with impunity, targeting and intimidating perceived government critics and opposition figures. Journalists also faced increasing harassment, including the continued detention of Sandra Muhoza despite a court ruling declaring her conviction invalid. The May to June 2025 parliamentary elections took place amid a climate of fear, restricted civic space, and limited political pluralism. The UN Human Rights Council (The Council's) decision to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Burundi underscored growing international concern over systemic abuses, entrenched impunity, and the erosion of rule of law. These trends point to a sustained pattern of state repression and a shrinking civic space, raising fears of renewed instability as the country approaches future elections.

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).

Eritrea

Eritrea's civic space remains completely closed, with the government maintaining tight control over all aspects of public life. Authorities continue to suppress freedom of expression, association, and assembly through censorship, surveillance, and arbitrary detention. Independent media and civil society are banned, and journalists remain imprisoned without trial, making the country the lowest-ranked globally in press freedom.

Ethiopia

The human rights situation in Ethiopia remains deeply concerning, with widespread violations by both state and non-state actors and a continued erosion of civic space ahead of the 2026 elections. Authorities have intensified restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, marked by intimidation and suspension of CSOs, and harassment of independent media and journalists. Proposed amendments to the civil society law, alongside recent legislative changes on media and anti-money laundering, have raised fears of greater state control over non-governmental actors. In conflict-affected regions, including Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray, civilians continue to suffer from killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and sexual and gender-based violence, with little accountability for perpetrators.

Kenya

Kenya's human rights landscape deteriorated sharply in the reporting period, with authorities intensifying repression of protests and escalating violations of fundamental freedoms. Security forces used excessive force during nationwide demonstrations, with the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) documenting dozens of deaths, injuries, and enforced disappearances. Senior officials, including the President and the Interior Cabinet Secretary, issued directives authorising live fire against protesters, normalising extrajudicial violence. Authorities intensified harassment of HRDs and civil society, arbitrarily arresting activists such as Rose Njeri and Boniface Mwangi and deporting Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) advisor Martin Mavunjina. Peaceful assemblies were disrupted through roadblocks, mass arrests, and collaboration between police and armed gangs, while the proposed Public Order Amendment Bill 2025 further threatened the right to protest. Freedom of expression deteriorated as journalists and filmmakers were detained, media broadcasts were suspended, and internet access was restricted. The custodial death of blogger Albert Ojwang and the attack on KHRC offices exemplified deepening impunity. Despite the progressive enactment of the *Persons with Disabilities Act 2025*, Kenya's civic space remained severely repressed.

Rwanda

Rwanda's human rights environment remains highly restrictive, with authorities continuing to limit political participation and civic engagement. Opposition leaders and independent voices face intimidation, detention, or forced exile. The rearrest of opposition leader Victoire Ingabire on 19 June 2025 highlights the ongoing suppression of dissent and shrinking space for political opposition, reflecting the continued use of the justice system to target critics and opposition figures. CSOs and media outlets operate under strict limitations, particularly on commentary regarding the government, security forces, or the official account of the 1994 genocide. The Supreme Court's ruling upholding the constitutionality of Article 39 of the 2018 Cybercrime Law, which criminalises the publication of rumours online, demonstrates constraints on online expression. Rwandan authorities have been implicated in cross-border violations through support for the M23 armed group in the Democratic Republic of Congo, providing military and logistical assistance to a group responsible for widespread abuses against civilians, including killings, forced displacement, and recruitment of child soldiers.

Somalia/Somaliland

Somalia's human rights landscape is marked by ongoing conflict, insecurity, and entrenched impunity. Al-Shabaab continues to commit widespread abuses, including killings, abductions, and targeted attacks on civilians, journalists, and HRDs. State actors, particularly the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), have also been implicated in violations, including intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and harassment of independent media. Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly remain under severe strain, with journalists facing censorship, physical attacks, and restrictions while covering protests and political events. Women and girls continue to endure sexual and gender-based violence with limited avenues for redress. While recent legislative steps, such as the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, signal progress, weak accountability and persistent repression continue to undermine civic space and fundamental rights.

South Sudan

South Sudan faces a looming humanitarian crisis driven by intensifying conflict, deliberate assaults on civilians and aid facilities, and escalating political instability. Renewed clashes between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) in Jonglei and Upper Nile States have left hundreds dead, displaced thousands, and devastated critical infrastructure. The UN has recorded a surge in violations, with nearly 2,000 civilians killed and hundreds abducted or subjected to sexual violence since January 2025. Security forces continue to carry out extrajudicial executions and arbitrary arrests, reflecting entrenched impunity and disregard for the rule of law. Civic space remains severely restricted as authorities suppress dissent and curtail access to information, exemplified by the closed-door trial of suspended First Vice President Riek Machar, which has raised serious concerns about transparency and fair trial standards. The UN Security Council's renewal of the arms embargo until 2026 signals deepening global concern over the flow of arms contributing to violence, human rights violations, and instability. As political divisions widen and violence intensifies, South Sudan's fragile peace process risks total collapse without immediate, coordinated action to safeguard civilians and uphold human rights.

Sudan

Sudan is facing one of the gravest human rights and humanitarian crises in decades as the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) enters its 30th month. Tens of thousands have died, and over 11 million people, including 8.6 million internally, have been displaced. Both parties have committed widespread abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances, sexual and gender-based violence, and deliberate attacks on civilians through bombardment and starvation. Civic space is all but closed, with journalists subjected to killings, abductions, and arbitrary detention, including the killing of photojournalist Al-Shykh Al-Samany and the imprisonment of others. The Human Rights Council has condemned atrocities, extended the mandate of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission, and called for accountability, humanitarian access, and a Sudanese-led civilian transition.

Tanzania

Between May and October 2025, Tanzania's human rights situation deteriorated sharply ahead of the general elections scheduled for 29 October. Political space narrowed further as authorities intensified harassment and intimidation of opposition figures, journalists, and activists. The Independent National Electoral Commission's disqualification of ACT-Wazalendo's presidential candidate, Luhaga Mpina, despite a High Court order to reinstate him, raised serious concerns over institutional independence and electoral credibility. Human Rights Watch documented multiple incidents of abductions, torture, and assaults targeting critics. Security forces and unidentified actors have continued to use violence to silence dissent. Freedom of expression remains under severe threat. Authorities blocked access to X, Telegram, and Clubhouse and shut down over 80,000 websites for "unethical content." In September, the Communications Regulatory Authority suspended JamiiForums for allegedly insulting the government, while independent outlet *The Chanzo* was ordered to remove an article on abductions. Religious leaders, including Father Charles Kitima, have also faced violent reprisals for calling for reform. These developments reflect deepening repression, institutionalised censorship, and growing impunity, underscoring Tanzania's continued democratic backsliding and the erosion of fundamental freedoms ahead of the 2025 polls.

Uganda

Uganda witnessed a worsening human rights situation in 2025, marked by escalating repression of journalists, environmental defenders, and political opposition. Security forces and non-state actors increasingly targeted journalists through assaults, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation, reflecting a growing pattern of violence aimed at silencing critical reporting and restricting public access to information. Opposition members, particularly from the National Unity Platform (NUP), faced abductions, raids, and unlawful detentions, while repeated attacks on party offices underscored deepening political intolerance and the militarisation of policing. Environmental defenders opposing projects such as the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) continued to experience harassment and criminalisation. The enactment of the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025, allowing civilians to be tried in military courts despite a Supreme Court ruling, further undermined judicial independence and civic freedoms, signalling an increasingly authoritarian trajectory ahead of the 2026 general elections.

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 the use of 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 fully implement the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Resolution on the Human Rights Situation in the United Republic of Tanzania (ACHPR/Res.640 (LXXXIV) 2025), including by addressing the Commission's concerns on civic space, media freedom, and the protection of human rights defenders, and by taking concrete steps to ensure accountability and alignment with regional human rights standards.
- Call on the government of Tanzania to implement
- Call on 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 Joint Fact-Finding Mission into the human rights situation in Sudan, established under ACHPR Resolution 590, to promptly release its findings and reports since its establishment.

- Call on the government of Eritrea and Djibouti to provide 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, prioritize 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

General situation

Burundi's legislative and local elections, held on 5 June 2025, unfolded in a deeply repressive political environment, marked by widespread restrictions on free expression, political participation, and media independence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) announced that the ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party had secured 96.5 per cent of the vote and all contested seats in the National Assembly, as well as complete control of commune-level councils.¹ The electoral process was marred by reports of intimidation, harassment, and threats by ruling party officials and the *Imbonerakure* militia, the CNDD-FDD's youth league, who allegedly coerced voters and obstructed opposition participation. Voters and civil society actors reported ruling party dominance at polling stations, ballot stuffing, inflated voter turnout, and exclusion of opposition members. Media faced heavy censorship, with all election-related coverage reportedly vetted by a central editorial team under the Ministry of Communication. Election observers, journalists, and opposition agents were denied access to polling and vote-counting centres, further eroding the credibility of the process and entrenching authoritarian control.

Between January and August 2025, Burundian CSOs documented 26 cases of enforced disappearances, many of which occurred during the May to June parliamentary elections.² The incidents appeared linked to efforts to suppress dissent and mainly targeted members of the CNL, the main opposition party. Victims were reportedly apprehended in public places and taken away in vehicles with tinted windows to unknown locations, with their whereabouts remaining unknown. SNR agents were identified as the primary perpetrators, yet no investigations or prosecutions have been initiated. During the same period, CSOs recorded 60 arbitrary arrests and detentions, largely affecting members of opposition parties and Congolese nationals in Cibitoke province accused of ties to the M23 movement. Reports further indicated 65 cases of torture, often carried out in SNR facilities or during interrogations. The *Imbonerakure* youth group was also implicated in abuses. These developments point to a continued erosion of human rights and civic freedoms, amid a climate of impunity and political repression.

Over 40 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) urged the Council to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Burundi. In a joint letter released ahead of the Council's 60th session in September, the groups warned that serious abuses continue 10

¹ HRW, "Burundi: Elections Without Opposition," 12 June 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/12/burundi-elections-without-opposition>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

² SOS Torture, "Burundi: Civil society is concerned about the numerous cases of enforced disappearances in 2025," 30 August 2025, <https://sostortureburundi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/ENG-Declaration-Disparitions-Forcees-Burundi-2025-VF.pdf>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

years after the 2015 crisis, with perpetrators acting in impunity.³ They cautioned that Burundi's ongoing electoral cycle, running from 2025 to the 2027 presidential election, increases the risk of renewed repression. The NGOs stressed that the Special Rapporteur remains vital for documenting violations and ensuring international scrutiny of Burundi's human rights situation.

10 years after the 2015 political crisis, Burundi's human rights situation remains concerning, prompting the Council to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the country.⁴ The decision, adopted under Resolution A/HRC/60/L.13,⁵ ensures continued international scrutiny as Burundi enters a prolonged electoral period marked by risks of serious human rights violations. The resolution condemns extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence, while denouncing the widespread impunity of perpetrators and the shrinking civic and democratic space. It calls for a safe environment for civil society, journalists, HRDs, and other independent actors. The Council also expressed concern over the restrictive conditions surrounding the 2025 parliamentary and local elections, which were characterised by limited political pluralism and a climate of fear.

Freedom of association

On 15 May 2025, Dismas Minani, the provincial representative of the "Burundi Bwa Bose" coalition in Ngozi province, and other coalition members were violently assaulted by members of the ruling CNDD-FDD party.⁶ Eyewitnesses reported that the group was ambushed by CNDD-FDD affiliates led by Pascal Nyabenda, a local *Imbonerakure* leader. The attackers severely beat the victims, who sustained serious injuries, and proceeded to extort a motorcycle and cash amounting to 1,087,000 Burundian francs (approx. 350 US dollars). Despite the gravity of the assault, the perpetrators remain at large, with no investigation launched to hold them accountable.

Freedom of opinion and expression

The ongoing detention of journalist Sandra Muhoza raises concerns about due process and judicial accountability in Burundi. Despite a ruling by the Bujumbura Mairie Court of Appeal on 30 May 2025 declaring that the lower court lacked jurisdiction to try her,

³ DefendDefenders, "Burundi: As risk factors multiply, extend the Special Rapporteur's mandate," 20 August 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/burundi-risk-factors-extend-sr-mandate/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴ DefendDefenders, "Burundi: international human rights scrutiny continues," 6 October 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/burundi-human-rights-scrutiny-continues/>, accessed on 9 October 2025.

⁵ OHCHR, "60th regular session of the Human Rights Council: Resolutions, decisions and President's statements," 6 October 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session60/res-dec-stat>, accessed on 9 October 2025.

⁶ SOS Torture Burundi, "REPORT NO. 492 PUBLISHED ON 18 MAY 2025," <https://sostortureburundi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Weekly-report-n%C2%B0492.pdf>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

Muhoza remains in prison.⁷ She was convicted in December 2024 by the Mukaza High Court of undermining national integrity and inciting ethnic hatred over comments made in a journalists' WhatsApp group, and sentenced to 21 months in prison. The appeal court determined that both the trial and conviction were invalid, stating she should have been tried in the northern Ngozi region, where she lived and was arrested.

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.

Freedom of expression

The 2025 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), ranks Djibouti 168 out of 180 countries, placing it among the nations with the most repressive environments for press freedom.⁸ This ranking indicates a "very serious" situation for journalists and media outlets operating in the country.

Eritrea

General situation

In May, the Special Rapporteur documented that Eritrea continues to face severe and systematic human rights violations, with civic space remaining entirely closed.⁹ The report highlights the ongoing repression of civil and political rights, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and the absence of accountability and rule of law. Indefinite national service continues to have devastating impacts on the population. Freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly are completely denied, with no space for independent media, civil society, or political opposition. The government maintains strict control over information, offering little transparency and restricting access to the internet through surveillance and censorship. Private gatherings are closely monitored, and any perceived dissent results in arrest or intimidation. The Special Rapporteur also noted the deteriorating situation of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers globally and the government's limited cooperation with human rights mechanisms.

⁷ CPJ, "Burundi journalist Sandra Muhoza still behind bars, 2 months after appeal ruling," 31 July 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/07/burundi-journalist-sandra-muhoza-still-behind-bars-2-months-after-appeal-ruling/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁸ RSF, "World Press Freedom Index 2025: economic fragility a leading threat to press freedom," 14 May 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-world-press-freedom-index-2025-economic-fragility-leading-threat-press-freedom>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁹ UN, "A/HRC/59/24 - General Assembly - the United Nations," 12 May 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/24>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

On 4 July 2025, the Council adopted a resolution during its 59th session to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea, maintaining oversight of one of Africa's most repressive states.¹⁰ The decision, passed by 23 votes to four with 20 abstentions, followed the rejection of an alternative resolution tabled by Eritrea seeking to terminate the mandate. Resolution L.7 highlights ongoing and severe human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, and the indefinite conscription policy into national service. It also raises concerns over the absence of national elections since 1993, patterns of transnational repression targeting government critics abroad, and Eritrea's persistent refusal to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Eritrea retained its position as the lowest-ranking country in the 2025 Global Press Freedom Index, reflecting the total absence of media freedom.¹¹ The government controls all information through censorship, surveillance, and intimidation. It bans independent journalism and owns or tightly regulates every media outlet. Journalists remain detained without trial, silencing all dissent and preventing any form of free expression.

Ethiopia

General situation

On 14 May 2025, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) officially withdrew the legal status of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), citing the party's failure to implement corrective measures as required under Proclamation No. 1332/2016.¹² NEBE's decision, announced in a formal statement, claimed that despite the TPLF's legal recognition under a special arrangement following the 2022 Pretoria Agreement, the party failed to meet its obligations, including holding a general assembly. The move has raised serious concerns about the stability of the fragile peace process that ended two years of conflict in northern Ethiopia.¹³ The TPLF, which leads Tigray's interim administration, attributed its inability to hold internal elections to unresolved leadership disputes and denounced the deregistration as politically motivated. In a letter to the African Union, the party warned that the decision undermines the Pretoria Agreement's

¹⁰ DefendDefenders, "Eritrea: UN mandate extended despite government's attempt to end scrutiny," 4 July 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/eritrea-mandate-extended-despite-govt-attempt-to-end-scrutiny/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹ RSF, "World Press Freedom Index 2025: economic fragility a leading threat to press freedom," 14 May 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-world-press-freedom-index-2025-economic-fragility-leading-threat-press-freedom>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹² Africa 24, "Ethiopia : the Tigray People's Liberation Front legal status revoked," 16 May 2025, <https://africa24tv.com/ethiopia-the-tigray-peoples-liberation-front-legal-status-revoked>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³ BBC, "Tigray party says ban threatens Ethiopia peace deal," 16 May 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czxykqdlkego>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

core principles of mutual legitimacy and dialogue-based conflict resolution. TPLF officials argue that revoking the party's status not only disrupts the region's political transition but also risks reigniting tensions in a context already marked by delayed implementation of the peace deal and the ongoing displacement of civilians. With national elections expected by June 2026, the exclusion of a major political figure increases the risk of renewed instability and democratic backsliding.

In an oral statement at the 60th UN Human Rights Council session, DefendDefenders expressed deep concern over Ethiopia's worsening human rights situation. The statement highlighted ongoing armed conflicts, rising insecurity, and stalled transitional justice efforts, which reflect a lack of accountability by national institutions.¹⁴ It warned that the narrowing civic space, growing repression of journalists and HRDs, and proposed amendments to the Civil Society Proclamation threaten the independence of NGOs and undermine democratic freedoms. DefendDefenders also criticised the decision to end the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and urged renewed collective international action to address the country's human rights crisis.

The TPLF refuted government claims that it is preparing for war in alliance with Eritrea, instead accusing the Ethiopian government of breaching the 2022 Pretoria peace agreement.¹⁵ In a letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the TPLF criticised what it described as politically motivated allegations and warned of a deteriorating situation threatening the peace process. It accused the federal government of failing to honour its commitments under the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, citing the continued presence of non-Ethiopian National Defence Force troops in Tigray, alleged land occupations, and efforts to alter the region's demographic composition. The TPLF also raised concern over the plight of displaced persons unable to return home and denounced NEBE's actions against its legal status as politically driven. It further criticised the government's militarisation of the region, including the training of new militias such as the Tekeze Guards. The TPLF dismissed accusations of renewed conflict preparation as baseless and warned that such rhetoric risks undermining reconciliation and reigniting instability in northern Ethiopia.

Freedom of association

In early June 2025, the Ethiopian government suspended the Ethiopian Health Professionals Association (EHPA), escalating its response to a month-long strike by public healthcare workers demanding fair wages and improved working conditions.¹⁶ On 30

¹⁴ DefendDefenders, "DefendDefenders' oral statements at HRC60," 9 September 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/oral-statements-hrc60/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁵ DNE Africa, "TPLF accuses Ethiopia of breaking peace deal, denies war plot with Eritrea," 9 October 2025, <https://africa.dailynewsegypt.com/tplf-accuse-ethiopia-denies-eritrea-pact/#:~:text=Font%20ResizerAa-.TPLF%20accuses%20Ethiopia%20of%20breaking%20peace%20deal%2C%20denies%20war%20plot,figure%20of%20the%20peace%20process.%E2%80%9D>, accessed on 10 October 2025.

¹⁶ HRW, "Ethiopia: Crackdown on Health Workers' Protests," 25 June 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/25/ethiopia-crackdown-on-health-workers-protests>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

May, the EHPA condemned the dismissals, intimidation tactics, and efforts to replace striking workers. Thereafter, the Authority for Civil Society Organisations (ACSO) suspended the EHPA, citing procedural issues, though its president, Yonatan Dagnaw, insisted the association had complied with national regulations and linked the suspension to its support for the strike. Despite a dialogue involving the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and a meeting between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and selected healthcare professionals, the government failed to resolve the grievances.

On 2 June 2025, police officers arrested former State Minister of Peace, Taye Dendea, after the Federal Supreme Court reinstated two criminal charges that had previously been dropped. The new charges accuse him of inciting violence, supporting anti-peace forces, and violating firearm possession laws.¹⁷ However, Taye's lawyer pointed to a pattern of legal violations, including the absence of a valid arrest warrant, conflicting information given to Taye and his family, and denying him access to legal representation. On 3 June, the Lideta Branch of the Federal High Court revoked Taye's earlier bail and ordered his continued detention. His lawyer criticised the court session for being held during the lunch break and without legal counsel present, calling it a deliberate move to reverse the bail decision in secret.¹⁸ Taye was initially arrested in December 2023, a day after he was removed from his ministerial position following public criticism of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. He was then accused of supporting armed groups and using social media to incite violence. In August 2024, the Federal High Court acquitted him of those charges, ruling that his posts and interviews were protected under the constitution as free expression. His re-arrest and the manner in which it was conducted have raised serious concerns about due process, judicial independence, and the use of legal institutions to suppress dissent in Ethiopia.

The draft amendment to Ethiopia's CSO Proclamation, proposed by the Ministry of Justice in July 2025, marks a significant shift in Ethiopia's regulatory framework, expanding state oversight and limiting civic space.¹⁹ It empowers the Ethiopian ACSO to suspend groups on the basis of suspicion or perceived risk, replacing the current safeguard that limits suspension to confirmed violations by the Director-General and for a fixed duration. The bill imposes sweeping restrictions on foreign and foreign-established organisations, barring their direct or indirect engagement in political advocacy, election observation, voter education, and related technical or financial support. It further introduces heavy administrative burdens by subjecting organisations to prior approval for registration, property acquisition, bank transactions, and borrowing, alongside a mandatory four-year licence renewal cycle. The Authority would also retain wide discretion to deny registration if it considers an organisation a potential security threat. These restrictions

¹⁷ APA News, "Ethiopian ex state minister rearrested," 03 June 2025, <https://apanews.net/ethiopian-ex-state-minister-rearrested/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁸ Addis Standard, "News: Federal High Court revokes bail for ex-State Minister Taye Dendea; lawyer alleges secretive hearing, absence of legal counsel," 03 June 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/federal-high-court-revokes-bail-for-ex-state-minister-taye-dendea-lawyer-alleges-secretive-hearing-absence-of-legal-counsel/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁹ Addis Standard, "Analysis: Proposed CSO law amendment raises fears of Ethiopia's repressive backslide," 02 July 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/proposed-cso-law-amendment-raises-fears-of-ethiopias-repressive-backslide/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

reverse key post-2018 reforms that had enabled greater civic participation and international engagement in governance processes. Although the Ministry cites consultations with stakeholders and claims the revisions are grounded in extensive studies, legal experts and rights advocates warn the changes could entrench government control, weaken independent oversight, and undermine democratic processes.²⁰

On 21 July 2025, ACSO summoned senior staff of the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC) and instructed them to remove their founder and Executive Director, Mr Yared Hailemariam, within one to two weeks. Officials reportedly cited his outspoken human rights advocacy on social media and other platforms as the reason for the order, while warning that suspension remained an option if the board failed to act. This directive constitutes direct government interference in the internal governance of a CSO, contravening Ethiopia's 2019 CSO Proclamation and international obligations on freedom of association. It also reflects a pattern of targeted harassment against Mr Hailemariam, who, despite receiving the 2024 Schuman EU Award for his decades of work promoting democracy and human rights, has faced persistent surveillance and pressure. Yared resigned on 1 August 2025.²¹ The development comes at a time when authorities are seeking to amend the CSO law to broaden state oversight and expand suspension powers, signalling a wider effort to shrink civic space and deter independent human rights advocacy in Ethiopia.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

In May 2025, healthcare workers across Ethiopia launched a nationwide protest demanding improved pay, better working conditions, and protection of their rights. The strike, preceded by public protests and online campaigns under hashtags such as #HealthWorkersMatter, triggered widespread concern and government backlash.²² Senior doctors reported unbearable workloads and warned that the suspension of non-emergency services was already jeopardising patient care, stating the situation could not be sustained beyond a week without resolution. Instead of engaging constructively, authorities responded with intimidation and arrests. Throughout the month, dozens of healthcare workers were detained without charge, including leaders of the EHPA and Dr Mahlet Guush, who was held for over three weeks following a media interview critical of the government.²³ Her case, along with arrests in the Amhara region by local militias,

²⁰ Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Authorities must drop proposed changes to the CSO law, halt restrictions on civic space," 18 August 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/0185/2025/en/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

²¹ Addis Standard, "News: Director of rights organization resigns over surveillance, intimidation," 31 July 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/director-of-rights-organization-resigns-over-surveillance-intimidation/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

²² Addis Standard, "News: Dr. Mahlet Guush released on bail after three weeks in detention linked to nationwide health workers' strike," 12 June 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/dr-mahlet-guush-released-on-bail-after-three-weeks-in-detention-linked-to-nationwide-health-workers-strike/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

²³ HRW, "Ethiopia: Crackdown on Health Workers' Protests," 25 June 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/25/ethiopia-crackdown-on-health-workers-protests>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

illustrates the pattern of arbitrary detention and harassment. Despite the Health Ministry's order to return to work and claims that some workers were spreading misinformation, authorities have not formally invoked the Labour Proclamation, which restricts strike action for medical practitioners. The civil servants' law, under which most healthcare workers fall, does not explicitly prohibit strikes. Nevertheless, the government accused striking professionals of incitement and attempting to erode public trust.

On 5 July 2025, the Bahir Dar City High Court in Ethiopia's Amhara region granted police an additional five days to detain and investigate Dr Daniel Fentahun, a prominent gynaecology and obstetrics resident at Bahir Dar University, over his alleged role in leading a protest involving detained healthcare workers that began in May.²⁴ He faces charges of inciting, mobilising and organising a health workers' strike that authorities claim led to loss of life. The extension follows a similar five-day remand granted on 27 June, with police citing unresolved matters requiring clarification. His arrest came shortly after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused unnamed actors of hijacking the strike, asserting it had been overtaken by political opportunists and accusing some participants of politicising the medical profession.

Freedom of opinion and expression

On 8 June 2025, plainclothes security officers in Addis Ababa arrested journalist Tesfalem Waldyes at the Ghion Hotel.²⁵ On 10 June, Tesfalem appeared before the Addis Ababa City First Instance Kirkos Division Court, where police accused him of spreading false information. The court granted bail of 15,000 birr approximately (US\$109) and issued a release order upon payment. However, despite no formal appeal being filed by police against the release, authorities continued to detain Tesfalem in clear defiance of the court's decision.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed publicly criticised sections of the Ethiopian media, accusing them of prioritising personal or organisational interests over the national good.²⁶ In a recent interview broadcast across state and party-affiliated outlets, he urged journalists and media institutions to centre their work on advancing Ethiopia's national interests. He likened the media to tools such as fire or a machete, capable of both constructive and destructive outcomes depending on how they are used. The Prime Minister dismissed the concept of media independence, asserting that no media is truly impartial. Echoing his remarks, the Government Communication Service accused commercial media of framing national priorities through a partisan or governmental lens, thereby undermining broader national discourse. These comments reflect a growing pattern of official rhetoric

²⁴ Addis Standard, "News: Bahir Dar high court grants extended remand, investigation period in case of Dr. Daniel Fentahun," 5 July 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/bahir-dar-high-court-grants-extended-remand-investigation-period-in-case-of-dr-daniel-fentahun/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

²⁵ CPI, "Ethiopia detains prominent journalist despite court-ordered bail," 10 June 2025, <https://cpi.org/2025/06/ethiopia-detains-prominent-journalist-despite-court%E2%80%91ordered-bail/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

²⁶ Addis Standard, "News: PM Abiy accuses 'some media' outlets of prioritizing self-interest over 'national interest'," 9 June 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/pm-abiy-accuses-some-media-outlets-of-prioritizing-self-interest-over-national-interest/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

that questions media independence and frames critical reporting as a threat to national unity.

On 5 August 2025, police in Ethiopia's Somali Regional State arrested journalist Khadar Mohamed Ismael, a reporter with the state-owned *Somali Regional Television (SRTV)*.²⁷ According to *VOSS TV* and a witness, he remained in custody without formal charges. On 9 August, Khadar appeared in court without legal representation. He was questioned about a 4 August Facebook post on *SRTV's* page that featured local community members criticising the government. The post has since been removed.

On 13 August 2025, masked men in military-style uniforms abducted journalist Yonas Amare from his home in Sheger City, near Addis Ababa.²⁸ Witnesses said the men ordered residents indoors and seized mobile phones before taking him away. Yonas works for the privately owned *Reporter newspaper*. Addis Ababa police later told the outlet that he was not in their custody. His whereabouts remain unknown, raising concerns over enforced disappearance and the growing risks faced by journalists in Ethiopia's shrinking civic space.

Following a report on widespread protests over poor working conditions for healthcare workers, the Ethiopian Media Authority accused *Sheger FM* of "incitement to violence and bias" and ordered the removal of the segment from its social media platforms.²⁹ On 3 September, federal police and plainclothes security officers raided *Sheger FM's* offices in Addis Ababa, detaining head of news Eshete Assefa and arresting journalists Mintamir and Tigist. Eshete was released later that evening without charge, while Mintamir and Tigist remain in detention at the Federal police Crime Investigation Bureau, with no charges disclosed. Their court appearance on 5 September before the Federal High Court in Lideta was postponed due to a full docket.

Kenya

General situation

On 8 May 2025, President William Ruto signed into law the Persons with Disabilities Act 2025, marking a significant milestone in the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Kenya. The legislation establishes a comprehensive legal framework to guarantee access to education, employment, healthcare, political participation, and public spaces for PWDs.³⁰ It addresses long-standing issues of

²⁷ CPJ, "Ethiopian journalist abducted by masked men; 2 others detained," 20 August 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/08/ethiopian-journalist-abducted-by-masked-men-2-others-detained/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ CPJ, "Ethiopian police detain 2 Sheger FM journalists, force station to delete report," 5 September 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/09/ethiopian-police-detain-2-sheger-fm-journalists-force-station-to-delete-report/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³⁰ Daily Nation, "Kenya's landmark disability rights law a turning point for reproductive justice," 17 May 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/health/kenya-s-landmark-disability-rights-law-a-turning-point-for-reproductive-justice-5044316>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

exclusion, stigma, and systemic neglect by embedding disability rights within Kenya's constitutional and international obligations, notably Articles 2(6), 27, 54, and 260 of the Constitution, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).³¹ The Act reinforces the principle that disability rights are central to human dignity and social justice, signalling a shift towards an inclusive, rights-based approach to governance and development.

During a joint press conference with Finnish President Alexander Stubb, President William Ruto addressed recent reports of abductions, stating that the government had taken firm steps to prevent such incidents from recurring.³² Ruto claimed that all previously missing individuals had been reunited with their families but offered no information about who was responsible for the abductions, raising ongoing concerns about transparency and accountability.

Freedom of association

On 30 May 2025, police officers arrested Rose Njeri, a software engineer, for developing a digital tool that enabled citizens to challenge the government's Finance Bill 2025.³³ The platform flagged contentious clauses linked to rising living costs and facilitated public engagement by directing emails to parliament. Police detained Njeri without legal counsel, coerced her into surrendering her electronic devices and passwords, and denied her bail without justification despite intervention by her lawyers and the Law Society of Kenya (LSK). Held over the weekend and a public holiday, Njeri remained in custody until her arraignment on 3 June, when prosecutors charged her with "unauthorised interference with a computer system" under the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act. The charge sheet claimed that the platform disrupted the normal functioning of the National Assembly Clerk's systems. Njeri was eventually released on a Ksh 100,000 bond. In response, on 4 June 2025, the Commissioner Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Kenya at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights issued a letter of urgent appeal to President William Ruto, raising concern over the arbitrary arrest and due process violations in Njeri's case.³⁴ The court dismissed all charges against Rose Njeri, ruling that they did not disclose any offence on 20 June 2025. Magistrate Geoffrey

³¹ KNCHR, "Enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2025: A Landmark Victory for Human Rights in Kenya," 9 May 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1224/Enactment-of-the-Persons-with-Disabilities-Act-2025-A-Landmark-Victory-for-Human-Rights-in-Kenya>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³² Citizen Digital, "President Ruto: There are no missing persons, all abducted Kenyans have returned home," 12 May 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/health/kenya-s-landmark-disability-rights-law-a-turning-point-for-reproductive-justice-5044316>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³³ Citizen Digital, "What we know about Rose Njeri's arrest, the contentious Finance Bill rejection tool," 3 June 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/article/what-we-know-about-rose-njeris-arrest-the-contentious-finance-bill-rejection-tool-n363924>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³⁴ ACHPR, "Statement on Letter of Urgent Appeal Concerning Ms. Rose Njeri," 06 June 2025, <https://achpr.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2025-06-06/statement-letter-urgent-appeal-concerning-ms-rose-njeri>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

Onsarigo found the charges vague and untenable.³⁵ He ordered the immediate return of Njeri's confiscated electronic devices, rejecting the prosecution's claim that they were still under review.

On 27 June 2025, police arrested three HRDs, namely, John Mulingwa Nzau (alias Garang), Mark Amiani (Generali), and Francis Mwangi (Chebukati), accusing them of inciting violence, theft, and destruction of property during the 25 June protests.³⁶ Despite these serious allegations, the Police Reforms Working Group, a coalition of 22 organisations advocating for accountable policing, strongly refuted the claims, emphasising that the activists played no role in the demonstrations. They cautioned the State against exploiting the unrest as a pretext to criminalise peaceful protest, silence dissent, and undermine constitutionally protected civic space. On 30 June, the three defenders were arraigned in court and charged with incitement and related offences. The prosecution, however, failed to provide credible evidence linking them to the violence, yet sought to detain them for an additional 21 days to continue investigations.³⁷ They were released on bail on 2 July, with a court date set for 23 July 2025.

On 5 July 2025, the Kenyan government unlawfully deported Martin Mavenjina, a senior legal advisor on transitional justice at the KHRC, in a move widely seen as politically motivated.³⁸ Mavenjina had returned from an official visit to South Africa the previous night, yet was abruptly deported despite holding valid work documentation permitting his stay and employment in Kenya. The KHRC condemned the action as part of a broader crackdown on civil society and HRDs, noting that the State has systematically targeted activists since 25 June.³⁹ The government's silence on the matter reinforces concerns of a coordinated campaign to suppress dissenting voices and restrict civic space. This deportation, lacking any legal justification, represents a clear violation of the right to peaceful assembly and association and signals increasing authoritarianism under the current regime. The KHRC has pledged to pursue all legal and diplomatic measures to ensure Mavenjina's return and to hold the State accountable for its ongoing repression.

³⁵ The star, "Court dismisses charges against web developer and activist Rose Njeri," 20 June 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-06-20-court-dismisses-charges-against-activist-rose-njeri>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³⁶ Daily Nation, "Activists dismiss DCI's claim linking three men in police custody to June 25 violence," 28 June 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/activists-dismiss-dci-linking-three-arrested-june-25-violence-5099246>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³⁷ Front Line Defenders, "Kenya: Arbitrary detention of human rights defenders and violent attack on women human rights defenders amid severe repression of civil society," 15 July 2025, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/kenya-arbitrary-detention-human-rights-defenders-and-violent-attack-women-human>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³⁸ The Star, "Goons raid KHRC offices, disrupt press conference by mothers over Saba Saba," 6 July 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-07-06-goons-raid-khrc-offices-disrupt-mothers-presser>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

³⁹ X, @KHRC, 6 July 2025, <https://x.com/thekhrc/status/1941801023078580618>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

On 19 July 2025, Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi was arrested at his home, a day after he and Ugandan lawyer-journalist Agather Atuhairwe filed a petition at the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) accusing the governments of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, alongside the EAC Secretary General, of gross human rights violations.⁴⁰ Initially, authorities claimed Mwangi was linked to terrorism-related activities, alleging his logistical and financial involvement in the 25 June protests. However, upon appearing before the Kahawa Magistrates Court, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) dropped the terror-related charges. Instead, Mwangi was charged with possession of three tear gas canisters and one round of blank ammunition without lawful authority under the Firearms Act.⁴¹ His legal counsel refuted these allegations, describing them as fabricated attempts to justify his arrest. The case raises serious concerns about the misuse of legal instruments to intimidate activists engaged in lawful civic and regional accountability efforts. Mwangi was released on bail.

On 22 August 2025, the High Court released three HRDs known as the Muthaiga Three. The Kibera Law Courts dismissed an application by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the DCI to extend investigations by 21 days, ruling that the 55 days already granted were sufficient.⁴² The three HRDs, who were arrested on 27 June over allegations linked to the 25 June protests, faced accusations of arson, theft, malicious damage to property, and incitement to violence. The court found that the prosecution had exhausted its time and adjournments, closed the file, and ordered their unconditional release.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Widespread protests erupted in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kilifi, and Kwale Counties following the death of blogger Albert Ojwang in police custody.⁴³ While demonstrators exercised their constitutional right to peaceful protest, police responded with excessive force, including tear gas and live ammunition. At least one unarmed bystander was shot, and 25 others hospitalised, five with gunshot wounds. In one tragic incident, Boniface Kariuki was reportedly selling masks and was shot at close range by a uniformed police officer and later died from his injuries.⁴⁴ In Nairobi, credible reports and protest observation

⁴⁰ The Star, "Activist Boniface Mwangi arrested after his Machakos house raid," 19 July 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-07-19-activist-boniface-mwangi-arrested>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴¹ The Star, "DCI drops terror charge against Boniface Mwangi," 21 July 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-07-21-dci-drops-terror-charge-against-boniface-mwangi>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴² The Eastleigh Voice, "'Muthaiga 3' activists set free after High Court rejects case extension request," 22 August 2025, <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/news/199719/muthaiga-3-activists-set-free-after-high-court-rejects-case-extension-request>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴³ KNCHR, "STATEMENT ON THE 17TH JUNE 2025 PROTESTS FOLLOWING THE KILLING OF ALBERT OJWANG," 17 June 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1227/STATEMENT-ON-THE-17TH-JUNE-2025-PROTESTS-FOLLOWING-THE-KILLING-OF-ALBERT-OJWANG>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴⁴ BBC, "Kenya protesters clash with men wielding clubs," 18 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74zjw55l93o>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

revealed that masked goons armed with tyre whips, batons, and knives were mobilised, transported, and deployed to disrupt protests and assault critics.⁴⁵ Disturbingly, security forces appeared to collaborate with these groups, with police observed coordinating with them at key locations such as Moi Avenue, Railways Club, and Kenyatta Avenue. Videos circulated of these violent actors publicly thanking Nairobi's Governor. Despite the violence, police failed to intervene effectively and instead arrested peaceful protesters, including four HRDs in Mombasa, who had followed legal procedures to notify authorities.⁴⁶ The KNCHR condemned the arbitrary arrests and called for the immediate and unconditional release of all peaceful demonstrators. The events reflect a troubling pattern of state-enabled suppression of dissent and demand urgent accountability and reform to safeguard civic freedoms.

On 25 June 2025, thousands of Kenyans demonstrated nationwide to mark the anniversary of youth-led protests against tax hikes and demand accountability for police brutality and systemic corruption. While the protests were largely peaceful, they were met with excessive police responses, including roadblocks,⁴⁷ barricades around key government buildings, and widespread deployment of security forces.⁴⁸ They used rubber bullets, live ammunition, and water cannons to disperse the crowds. The KNCHR documented 19 deaths, 531 injuries, 15 enforced disappearances, 179 arrests, and cases of sexual violence, including rape and attempted gang rape.⁴⁹ Authorities cited infiltration by criminal elements and property destruction, with credible reports indicating the use of "hired goons" to disrupt demonstrations in Eldoret, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nyeri, Kajiado, and Kisumu. These groups engaged in looting and violence, raising serious concerns about state-sanctioned sabotage of lawful protest.

On 2 July 2025, the Kenyan Parliament introduced the Public Order Amendment Bill, 2025, which poses a serious threat to the constitutionally protected right to peaceful assembly under Article 37.⁵⁰ The Bill imposes disproportionate restrictions by

⁴⁵ Amnesty International, "POLICE REFORMS WORKING GROUP STATEMENT ON YESTERDAY'S ANARCHY IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF NAIROBI," 18 June 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/police-reforms-working-group-statement-on-yesterdays-anarchy-in-the-capital-city-of-nairobi/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴⁶ X, @itskipronoh, 20 June 2025, <https://x.com/itskipronoh/status/1936138216018489783>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴⁷ Al Jazeera, "Sixteen killed, hundreds injured, in antigovernment Kenyan protests," 25 June 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/25/thousands-rally-in-kenya-to-mark-anniversary-of-antitax-demonstrations>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴⁸ KNCHR, "Statement on the 25th June 2025 Demonstrations," 25 June 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1229/Statement-on-the-25th-June-2025-Demonstrations>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁴⁹ KNCHR, "KNCHR UPDATE ON THE 25TH JUNE 2025 DEMONSTRATIONS," 28 June 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1230/KNCHR-UPDATE-ON-THE-25TH-JUNE-2025-DEMONSTRATIONS>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵⁰ Citizen Digital, "Government makes efforts to silence public protests through Bills," 2 July 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/article/government-makes-efforts-to-silence-public-protests-through-bills-n365598>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

prohibiting demonstrations within 100 meters of key state institutions, including Parliament, State House, and court premises, which are central to political expression and accountability. The Bill also makes it a crime to violate the new rules, with penalties of up to KSh 100,000 or a jail term of up to three months. It further grants the Cabinet Secretary for Interior sweeping powers to designate protest zones in consultation with county governments. These measures risk suppressing dissent, enabling arbitrary state control, and failing the tests of legality, necessity, and proportionality under both domestic and international human rights standards. Justifications based on prior protest-related violence do not warrant such sweeping restrictions, especially when law enforcement already holds the mandate to address disorder without infringing on fundamental freedoms.

On 7 July 2025, during the annual *Saba Saba* demonstrations, a historic day symbolising Kenya's pro-democracy struggle, state actions resulted in grave violations of the right to peaceful assembly and the freedom of movement. In anticipation of protests, the government set up extensive roadblocks across Nairobi and several counties, paralysing transport, restricting access to workplaces, hospitals, and schools, and stranding hundreds.⁵¹ While justified as public safety measures, these blockades appeared designed to obstruct mobilisation and deter participation. The KNCHR documented a deeply troubling toll of 38 deaths (including two children),⁵² 130 injuries, two abductions, and approximately 532 arrests across 17 counties.⁵³ Most fatalities resulted from gunshot wounds. Authorities escalated repression by invoking the Prevention of Terrorism Act against protestors and activists, charging 37 individuals, including opposition leaders and an MP, with terrorism-related offences.⁵⁴ Some were re-arrested immediately after securing bail and slapped with harsher charges, raising serious concerns over the misuse of anti-terror laws to suppress political dissent. Such charges enable prolonged pre-trial detention, deny access to fair trial guarantees, and erode due process rights.

Despite a court order requiring officers managing protests to remain identifiable and in uniform, authorities blatantly disregarded the order with numerous hooded officers operating from unmarked vehicles.⁵⁵ Disturbingly, criminal gangs armed with crude

⁵¹ KNCHR, "Statement on Human Rights Concerns During the Saba Saba Anniversary Demonstrations," 7 July 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1231/Statement-on-Human-Rights-Concerns-During-the-Saba-Saba-Anniversary-Demonstrations>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵² KNCHR, "KNCHR 3rd UPDATE ON THE SABA SABA DEMONSTRATIONS," 11 July 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1234/KNCHR-3-RD-UPDATE-ON-THE-SABA-SABA-DEMONSTRATIONS>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵³ KNCHR, "Update on the Saba Saba 2025 Demonstrations," 8 July 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1232/Update-on-the-Saba-Saba-2025-Demonstrations>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵⁴ Amnesty International, "DANGEROUS DRIFT AS KENYA GOVERNMENT BATTLES CITIZENS," 14 July 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/dangerous-drift-as-kenya-government-battles-citizens/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵⁵ Kenyans.co.ke, "High Court Directs Police Officers to Wear Nametags During Protests," 14 August 2024, <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/103590-high-court-directs-police-officers-wear-nametags-protest>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

weapons were seen patrolling alongside police in Nairobi, Kiambu, Kajiado, and Eldoret.⁵⁶ The government's heavy-handed response to *Saba Saba* demonstrates a calculated campaign to criminalise protest, intimidate civic actors, and shrink democratic space, in direct violation of constitutional protections and international human rights obligations.

On 26 June 2025, following the Gen Z commemoration protests in Kenya, the government escalated its crackdown on the right to peaceful assembly through inflammatory rhetoric, unlawful directives, and excessive use of force. Interior Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen dismissed credible reports of police brutality despite at least 10 confirmed deaths and over 400 injuries framing the protests as “terrorism disguised as dissent” and an “attempted coup,” without providing substantiating evidence.⁵⁷ In an alarming move, Murkomen publicly authorised police to shoot on sight anyone approaching police stations with perceived criminal intent, an extrajudicial directive that the LSK condemned as unconstitutional and illegal.⁵⁸ Following widespread backlash, Murkomen attempted to downplay the directive, stating that security agencies are well-trained and aware of their responsibility not to misuse authority. Similarly, on 9 July 2025, President William Ruto reinforced this hardline stance, urging police to shoot protesters in the legs to “incapacitate” them, normalising state violence against civilians and undermining the rule of law.⁵⁹ These statements legitimise the use of live ammunition against unarmed protesters and mark a dangerous shift towards a counter-insurgency approach to civic dissent. By framing protest as treason and encouraging extrajudicial responses, the government has deepened mistrust, weakened democratic safeguards, and signalled a sharp erosion of constitutional protections on freedom of assembly.

Freedom of expression

On 2 May 2025, police officers arrested four Kenyan filmmakers, including Nicholas Wambugu, Brian Adagala, Mark Denver Karubiu, and Christopher Wamae, reportedly in connection with the BBC's *Blood Parliament* documentary.⁶⁰ The Kenya Film and Television Professionals Association (KFPTA) confirmed that police confiscated their equipment and data storage devices during the raid. The four spent the night in separate

⁵⁶ KNCHR, “Statement on Human Rights Concerns During the Saba Saba Anniversary Demonstrations,” 7 July 2025, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1231/Statement-on-Human-Rights-Concerns-During-the-Saba-Saba-Anniversary-Demonstrations>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵⁷ BBC, “Kenya protests are 'coup attempt', says minister,” 26 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjwn257j7y2o>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵⁸ Citizen Digital, “Murkomen under fire over controversial 'Shoot on Sight' order,” 27 June 2025, https://citizen.digital/article/murkomen-under-fire-over-controversial-shoot-on-sight-order-n365362?_gl=1%2a19wxc7g%2a_gcl_au%2aMTM2NjE5MzU0LjE3NTE1MzcxMzY.%2a_ga%2aOTcxNTc00TAzLjE3MTQzOTM2ODQ.%2a_ga_18R0W3MNLV%2aczE3NTI0OTgyMDEkbzI1JGcwJHQxNzUyNDk4MjAxJGo2MCRsMCRoMA.., accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁵⁹ BBC, “Kenya's president orders police to shoot violent protesters in the leg,” 9 July 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenyas-president-orders-police-shoot-violent-protesters-leg-2025-07-09/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶⁰ Citizen Digital, “Four Kenyan filmmakers arrested in dramatic raid at their studios,” 03 May 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/article/four-kenyan-film-makers-arrested-in-dramatic-raid-at-their-studios-n362051>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

police cells before being released on free bond. However, the BBC clarified that the individuals were not involved in the production of the documentary.⁶¹ CSOs, including the Civic Freedoms Forum, condemned the arrests as politically motivated and reflective of a broader trend of using law enforcement to intimidate independent media practitioners.⁶²

On 7 June 2025, Kenyan blogger and teacher Albert Ojwang was arrested at his parents' home in Homa Bay County for allegedly spreading false information about Deputy Inspector General Eliud Lagat. He was transferred from Mawego Police Station to Nairobi's Central Police Station, where he died in custody the next day under suspicious circumstances.⁶³ While police initially claimed he may have committed suicide, an IPOA investigation and autopsy ruled out this possibility. CCTV footage revealed that officers brought Ojwang to Mbagathi Hospital at 1:35 a.m. on 8 June in a lifeless state and failed to seek immediate medical attention.⁶⁴ The footage shows a 24-minute delay before he was wheeled into the casualty ward, where medics confirmed he had been dead on arrival, with visible injuries consistent with prior trauma. These revelations raised serious concerns about the officers' conduct and prompted public outrage. In response, the Inspector General of Police retracted earlier statements, blaming junior officers, while IPOA arrested three individuals including the Nairobi Central police chief and opened a broader investigation.⁶⁵ President William Ruto condemned the killing, affirmed that Ojwang died in police custody, and directed full cooperation with IPOA. So far, at least 23 officers have been questioned and five suspended. On 16 June, Deputy Inspector General Eliud Lagat announced he had temporarily stepped down from his position as investigations proceed. On 23 June 2025, three police officers were charged with murder along with three civilians.⁶⁶ The incident has renewed calls for structural reforms and accountability in Kenya's policing system.

On 25 June 2025, the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) issued a directive ordering all television and radio stations to halt live coverage of ongoing demonstrations, citing alleged violations of constitutional provisions on freedom of expression and

⁶¹ NTV Kenya, "Filmmakers police link to BBC 'Blood Parliament' story released after night arrest," 03 May 2025, <https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/filmmakers-police-link-to-bbc-blood-parliament-story-released-after-night-arrest/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶² The Eastleigh Voice, "Police release four filmmakers arrested over BBC documentary 'Blood Parliament'," 03 May 2025, <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/national/145301/police-release-four-filmmakers-arrested-over-bbc-documentary-blood-parliament>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶³ Al Jazeera, "Killed 'by those meant to protect': Kenyans outraged by police violence," 09 July 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2025/7/9/killed-by-those-meant-to-protect-kenyans-outraged-by-police-violence>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶⁴ The Star, "Questions as CCTV footage shows arrival of Ojwang's body at Mbagathi Hospital," 15 June 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-06-15-cctv-shows-arrival-of-ojwangs-body-at-mbagathi>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶⁵ BBC, "Senior Kenyan policeman arrested over blogger's killing," 13 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cq54vl9wl77o>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶⁶ BBC, "Kenya's deputy police chief steps aside amid uproar over blogger's death," 16 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx24ggi6e8eo>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

media.⁶⁷ The authority claimed that broadcasting the protests contravened Articles 33(2) and 34(1) of the Constitution, as well as Section 46I of the Kenya Information and Communications Act, and warned of unspecified regulatory sanctions for non-compliance. Several privately owned stations, including *NTV*, *K24*, and *KTN*, were subsequently taken off-air, though they continued sharing protest footage online. This move drew immediate backlash from civil society,⁶⁸ with the Kenya Editors' Guild highlighting a prior High Court ruling that the CAK lacks constitutional authority to regulate media content.⁶⁹ Later that day, the LSK successfully obtained a High Court order compelling the restoration of broadcast signals.⁷⁰ Furthermore, NetBlocks, a global internet observatory, confirmed that access to the messaging platform Telegram had been restricted in Kenya.⁷¹ The shutdown reflects increasing state interference in media freedom and raises serious concerns over access to information during public demonstrations.

On the same day, two journalists were injured while covering the protests.⁷² *NTV* reporter Ruth Sarmwei sustained a leg injury from an unidentified projectile while interviewing demonstrators in Nakuru, while Standard Media Group photojournalist David Gichuru was struck by a stone thrown by a protestor in Nairobi.

On 6 July 2025, just a day before the annual *Saba Saba* demonstrations, hired goons allegedly linked to the State violently stormed the offices of the KHRC in a deliberate attempt to suppress civic mobilisation and intimidate HRDS.⁷³ The assailants disrupted a press conference organised by Kenyan mothers who were calling for an end to arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings targeting protesters. The attack, which resulted in physical assaults on two journalists and the theft of a laptop and mobile phones, was explicitly aimed at intimidating the KHRC from participating in the

⁶⁷ Citizen Digital, "Communications Authority orders stop to live broadcasts of June 25 protests," 25 June 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/article/communications-authority-orders-stop-to-live-broadcasts-of-june-25-protests-n365216>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, "Statement on the communications authority's directive to halt live broadcast of protests and potential shutdown of the internet for 56 million Kenyans," 25 June 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/statement-on-the-communications-authoritys-directive-to-halt-live-broadcast-of-protests-and-potential-shutdown-of-the-internet-for-56-million-kenyans/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁶⁹ X, @KenyaEditors, 25 June 2025, <https://x.com/KenyaEditors/status/1937839238810325317>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷⁰ The Star, "High Court suspends Communications Authority ban on live protest coverage," 25 June 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-06-25-court-suspends-cas-ban-on-live-protest-coverage>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷¹ X, @NetBlocks, 25 June 2025, <https://x.com/netblocks/status/1937854256331296830>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷² CPJ, "Live coverage of protests banned in Kenya, at least 2 journalists injured," 25 June 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/06/live-coverage-of-protests-banned-in-kenya-at-least-2-journalists-injured/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷³ X, @KHRC, 6 July 2025, <https://x.com/thekhrc/status/1941926118904238414>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

Saba Saba rallies scheduled for 7 July.⁷⁴ *Saba Saba*, a historic day of resistance and civic courage in Kenya, continues to serve as a rallying point for demands for accountability and justice.

Rwanda

General situation

Rwandan authorities have been linked to serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations beyond their borders through support for the M23 armed group in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁷⁵ Evidence indicates that Rwanda has provided military, logistical, and other forms of assistance to M23, a group responsible for widespread abuses against civilians, including killings, forced displacement, and recruitment of child soldiers.

Freedom of association

On 19 June 2025, Rwandan authorities rearrested opposition leader Victoire Ingabire, head of the unregistered political party Development and Liberty for All (DALFA–Umurinzi), in connection with an ongoing trial targeting member of her party.⁷⁶ According to the Rwanda Investigation Bureau, the Public Prosecutor’s Office ordered her arrest on allegations of forming a criminal group and planning activities intended to incite public disorder. Ingabire, a long-time critic of the government, previously spent nearly eight years in prison following her 2012 conviction on charges of conspiring to undermine the state and denying the 1994 genocide, charges widely viewed as politically motivated after she attempted to run in the 2010 presidential election. Although she received a presidential pardon in 2018, her latest arrest underscores the continued suppression of opposition voices and the shrinking political space in Rwanda.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Rwanda’s Supreme Court on 5 June 2025 upheld the constitutionality of Article 39 of the 2018 Cybercrime Law, rejecting a challenge brought by lawyer Jean Paul Ibambe.⁷⁷ The petitioner had argued that the provision, which criminalises the publication of rumours through digital platforms, is vague and open to misuse, allowing authorities to target

⁷⁴ X, @KHRC, 7 July 2025, <https://x.com/thekhrc/status/1942188261071311049>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷⁵ HRW, “DR Congo: M23 Armed Group Forcibly Transferring Civilians,” 18 June 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/18/dr-congo-m23-armed-group-forcibly-transferring-civilians>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷⁶ HRW, “Rwanda: Opposition Leader Arrested,” 24 June 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/24/rwanda-opposition-leader-arrested>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷⁷ KT Press, “Supreme Court Upholds Law Which Petitioners Said Violates Free Speech,” 7 June 2025, <https://www.ktpress.rw/2025/06/supreme-court-upholds-law-which-petitioners-said-violates-free-speech/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

dissenting voices and journalists. He contended that penalising speech-related offences with imprisonment contradicts constitutional guarantees of freedom of thought, opinion, and the press, and breaches international obligations under the ICCPR and the African Charter. The state defended the law as a necessary safeguard against harmful and destabilising misinformation in the digital era, asserting that it protects public order and individual dignity. In its decision, the Court ruled that the article constitutes a reasonable limitation on free expression, finding its intent and proportionality consistent with constitutional standards. While the Court reaffirmed the law's legitimacy, it urged vigilance to prevent its abuse.

Somalia

General situation

In August 2025, a faction of Somalia's main opposition alliance signed a new electoral agreement with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, marking a major political shift ahead of the next polls.⁷⁸ The breakaway group, which includes former Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, former parliamentary speakers Mohamed Mursal and Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, and veteran diplomat Dahir Mohamud Gelle, reached the deal following negotiations in Mogadishu. The agreement outlines a revised electoral framework aimed at advancing Somalia toward a one-person, one-vote system, in which federal lawmakers will be directly elected by citizens and will, in turn, choose the president. The framework maintains that the president will appoint the prime minister with parliamentary approval, while the House of the People retains the power to withdraw confidence.

Somalia's main opposition coalition, the Somali Salvation Forum, has formed a new political alliance with the presidents of Puntland and Jubaland in a coordinated effort to challenge President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as his term nears its end.⁷⁹ The agreement, reached during a meeting in Nairobi, brought together Jubaland President Ahmed Mohamed Islam Madobe, Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni, and leading opposition figures, including former Prime Ministers Abdi Farah Shirdon and Hassan Ali Khaire, as well as MP Abdirahman Abdishakur. In a joint communiqué, the leaders announced the creation of the Council for the Future of Somalia, a coalition aimed at countering what they described as President Mohamud's unilateral political agenda. The alliance was formed amid growing resistance to the president's push for a nationwide one-person, one-vote election, which critics argue is unrealistic under current security and political conditions and could be used to justify an extension of his term.

⁷⁸ TRT Afrika, "Somali opposition's breakaway faction strikes election deal with president," 27 August 2025, <https://www.trtafrika.com/english/article/b1fa1596d307>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁷⁹ Somalia Guardian, "Somalia's opposition, regional leaders form new alliance," 2 October 2025, <https://www.somaliguardian.com/news/somalia-news/somalias-opposition-regional-leaders-form-new-alliance/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

Gunfire erupted in Mogadishu on 10 September 2025 as opposition leaders and their armed escorts clashed with Somali police outside the Warta Nabadda district station.⁸⁰ The incident followed public outrage over viral footage showing officers assaulting two elderly civilians during forced evictions in nearby neighbourhoods. The confrontation left one person dead and several others injured, though casualty figures remain disputed. Opposition leaders, including former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and former Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khairi, accused the government of using excessive force during forced evictions and said they intervened to protect displaced residents. Government officials, however, claimed the opposition tried to storm a police station and portrayed the confrontation as a security threat.

In October 2025, Somalia's federal parliament ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, marking a key milestone in strengthening legal protections for children across the Horn of Africa.⁸¹ However, the ratification comes with significant reservations rooted in religious and constitutional considerations. In a statement following the vote, the Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development reaffirmed Somalia's commitment to advancing child rights. Still, it underscored that the national constitution and Islamic law remain the supreme sources of authority in interpreting and applying the charter.⁸² The ministry stated that provisions conflicting with Islamic teachings would not be implemented, citing articles on freedom of religion, minimum marriage age, adoption, and definitions of adulthood as inconsistent with Somali religious and cultural norms.

The UN Human Rights Council, at the conclusion of its 60th session, adopted a resolution terminating the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia and mandating the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to assume responsibility for technical assistance and reporting. Established in 1993, the Independent Expert mechanism has been instrumental in monitoring and documenting human rights developments in Somalia.⁸³ Its discontinuation marks a significant shift in the Council's engagement approach, moving from independent oversight to a technical cooperation framework. Given the persistence of serious human rights violations and institutional fragility, sustained international scrutiny remains imperative. It is therefore essential that credible, evidence-based assessments inform OHCHR's technical assistance and that reporting remain comprehensive and transparent. The meaningful participation

⁸⁰ KAAB TV, "Gunfire in Mogadishu Turns Evictions Into a Political Battleground," 25 September 2025, <https://en.kaabtv.com/gunfire-in-mogadishu-turns-evictions-into-a-political-battleground/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁸¹ [Anadolu Agency](https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-ratifies-african-charter-on-rights-welfare-of-children/3704659), "Somalia ratifies African charter on rights, welfare of children," 1 October 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-ratifies-african-charter-on-rights-welfare-of-children/3704659>, accessed on 8 October 2025.

⁸² Impact International, "Somalia Clarifies Position on African Children's Rights Charter Amid Islamic Law Concerns," 4 October 2025, <https://impactpolicies.org/news/612/somalia-clarifies-position-on-african-childrens-rights-charter-amid-islamic-law-concerns>, accessed on 9 October 2025.

⁸³ DefendDefenders, "Reflections on the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Council," 9 October 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/reflections-on-the-60th-session-of-the-un-human-rights-council/>, accessed on 10 October 2025.

of national actors, including HRDs and the National Independent Human Rights Commission, should be prioritised to ensure local ownership and accountability.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 8 September 2025, evicted families, mostly women and children, held a peaceful protest near the Mogadishu residence of Galmudug State President Ahmed Abdi Kaariye Qoor Qoor. The demonstrators were residents displaced from the former fire brigade camp in Wadajir district who accused the president of failing to fulfil his promise to provide them with alternative land following government-led demolitions.⁸⁴

Freedom of opinion and expression

Between January and April 2025, the Somalia Journalists Syndicate (SJS) recorded a sharp rise in media repression. Authorities arrested 46 journalists, kidnapped two, and shut or raided several outlets, including *Universal TV* and *Radio Risaala*.⁸⁵ More than 30 reporters lost equipment, while others faced beatings and intimidation. Government ministries actively targeted critical reporting, pushing many journalists into self-censorship or exile. Online spaces also narrowed, with Meta restricting pages critical of the government. Female journalists faced particular risks, with six cases of targeted attacks and harassment.

On 5 May 2025, NISA raided the home and media studio of journalists Bashir Ali Shire and Mohamed Omar Baakaay in Mogadishu.⁸⁶ They blindfolded and arrested Bashir, confiscated equipment, and detained Baakaay's brother, Anas Omar Mohamud. Witnesses report the agents beat Anas while demanding Mohamed's whereabouts before taking both men to the police station. They were later released, but Baakaay's passport, ID, and phone remain seized. He has since stated he cannot return home due to fear of further attacks. The raid came a day after Kaaraan District Commissioner Farah Adani incited violence against Baakaay, urging supporters to assault him and break into his home. Adani publicly branded the journalist a drug addict and worse than terrorists.

Between 22 and 24 May 2025, Somali security forces intensified their crackdown on journalists. On 22 May, police arrested *RNN TV* reporters Abdullahi Yusuf Hassan and Mohamed Hassan Geedi, and *Himilo Somali TV* cameraman Yahye Mohamud Hersi, while

⁸⁴ SJS, "Journalists covering protests and market reporting attacked by NISA and Galmudug president's guards in Mogadishu," 12 September 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/09/12/journalists-covering-protests-and-market-reporting-attacked-by-nisa-and-galmudug-presidents-guards/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁸⁵ SJS, "World Press Freedom Day 2025: Alarming Escalation: Attacks on Journalists and Media in Somalia and Somaliland," 3 May 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/05/03/world-press-freedom-day-2025-alarming-escalation-attacks-on-journalists-and-media-in-somalia-and-somaliland/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁸⁶ SJS, "Mogadishu journalists' residence raided, one arrested after district official calls for attacks with machetes and sticks," 6 May 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/05/06/mogadishu-journalists-residence-raided-one-arrested-after-district-official-calls-for-attacks-with-machetes-and-sticks/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

covering a protest by women meat sellers at Zoobe Junction.⁸⁷ They were handed to NISA officers who detained them, deleted their footage, and warned them against publishing any material on the demolitions. The next day, in South Galkayo, online reporter Ali Maalin Nuur was arrested after posting a video exposing alleged extortion by Galmudug security forces at a roadblock. He was held overnight without being recorded in the occurrence book, threatened, and forced to delete his report before release.

On 24 May, NISA agents detained 11 journalists from *Shabelle TV*, *SYL TV*, *Somali Cable TV*, *Goobjoog Media* and *Five Somali TV* while they were collecting public opinion on opposition criticism of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.⁸⁸ Their equipment was seized and footage deleted. *Dalbile TV* reporters Anisa Ahmed Mohamed and Masud Abdirahman Yusuf were also chased and harassed by plain-clothed NISA officers along Maka Al-Mukarama Street, where journalists said independent reporting had been effectively banned. Local media described a heavy presence of armed NISA agents in central Mogadishu and reported the arrest of a *tuk-tuk* driver and activist, Sayid Ali, for speaking out against repression.

On 30 May, police raided *Radio Wanlaweyn FM* and arrested its director, Ismail Khalif Ahmed, after the station reported that local officials were coercing residents to make payments for a hospital construction project.⁸⁹ Ismail was detained overnight, interrogated, and threatened with continued imprisonment unless the report was deleted and a public apology issued. Under pressure, the station removed the story.

On 28 May, security officers in Mogadishu's Kaxda district detained *RTN TV* journalists Nuh Farah Mahad and Mohamed Abdukadir, along with *Five Somali TV* reporter Mohamed Abdi Hassan, as they covered a protest by elders excluded from the voter registration exercise.⁹⁰ The journalists were threatened and released only after local elders intervened.

On 26 May, several reporters were attacked in Kaxda while documenting allegations that NISA agents had abducted casual labourers and forced them to register as voters. Similar reports emerged from Bakara Market, where journalists were threatened and had their equipment seized while covering incidents of alleged forced registration. These incidents demonstrate a growing pattern of unlawful arrests, censorship, and intimidation by security forces, aimed at silencing scrutiny of electoral malpractice and corruption.

⁸⁷ SJS, "15 journalists arrested in two days amid crackdown on media covering public opinion and political tensions in Mogadishu," 24 May 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/05/24/15-journalists-arrested-in-two-days-amid-crackdown-on-media-covering-public-opinion-and-political-tensions-in-mogadishu/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ SJS, "EU-trained police raid local radio, arrest journalist in Lower Shabelle; Turkish-trained Haramcad forces attack three journalists in Mogadishu," 1 June 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/06/01/eu-trained-police-raid-local-radio-arrest-journalist-in-lower-shabelle-turkish-trained-haramcad-forces-attack-three-journalists-in-mogadishu/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Armed officers in Mogadishu raided the premises of *SMS Somali TV*. They arrested three journalists, Osman Abdullahi Mohamed, Hussein Isse Mohamed, and Mahad Mohamed Abdirahman, after they returned from covering reports of forced evictions in the city.⁹¹ The journalists had been documenting the removal of families from public land allegedly sold to wealthy businessmen. CCTV footage from the station captured the officers physically assaulting and forcibly detaining the journalists. Mahad Mohamed Abdirahman was released later that evening, while Osman Abdullahi Mohamed and Hussein Isse Mohamed were held until the following afternoon and released without charge. The journalists claimed that security officers confiscated and deleted all footage from their assignment.

On 9 September 2025, the Puntland Attorney General's Office summoned journalists Suways Jama Mohamud and Hassan Abdi Ali for questioning following complaints filed by the Ministry of Information.⁹² Both journalists have faced growing pressure for their independent reporting critical of Puntland authorities. Suways, a reporter for *Puntland State TV* and founder of *Suways Media*, had earlier published an interview with a local commander from the SSC-Khaatumo group, after which she allegedly received threats of arrest and was unlawfully suspended from her position. Although the suspension was later overturned by the Ministry of Labour and *Puntland State TV*'s human resources office, Suways was summoned again in September and questioned about social media posts and vox pop interviews in which citizens criticised senior government officials, including the president and vice president. Similarly, Hassan Heykal, director of *Milgo Media*, was interrogated about five reports, among them interviews with critics of government conduct and commentary highlighting alleged abuses by security personnel linked to the vice president. Both journalists were accused of "criticising government officials and incitement" without being formally charged.

Somaliland

Somaliland authorities intensified their repression of independent media through arbitrary arrests, detentions, and intimidation of journalists, with some cases resulting in questionable court proceedings. SJS documented 10 cases of detentions and arrests between March and July 2025.⁹³ On 11 May, police arrested journalist Mohamed Abdi Hassan for allegedly inciting violence after he reported on clan tensions in the Sanaag region. On 23 May, freelance journalist Abdiqadir Mohamed Aw-Hassan was sentenced to six months in prison for "insulting the president" after posting a satirical video online. On 29 May, journalist Warsame Kaafi Abdirashid Aden was detained for interviewing a

⁹¹ SJS, "Journalists targeted and arrested in Mogadishu for reporting on Hassan Sheikh's forced evictions," 6 August 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/08/06/journalists-targeted-and-arrested-in-mogadishu-for-reporting-on-hassan-sheikhs-forced-evictions/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁹² SJS, "Two Puntland journalists face legal threats over critical reporting," 20 September 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/09/20/two-puntland-journalists-face-legal-threats-over-critical-reporting/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁹³ SJS, "Somaliland crackdown on independent reporting: 10 journalists arrested in five months," 14 July 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/07/14/somaliland-crackdown-on-independent-reporting-10-journalists-arrested-in-five-months/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

woman who accused a senior judge of assault. On 9 June, journalist Sa'id Muse Farah from Erigabo was fined after reporting on alleged mismanagement at Erigabo TB Hospital.

Similarly, on 22 June, *Saab TV* journalist Abdirisaaq Qaasim was detained in Berbera over allegations that he had anonymously posted criticism of senior officials online.⁹⁴ He was later transferred to Hargeisa and released after clan mediation. On 1 July, police in Hargeisa arrested journalist Yasir Ahmed Abdillahi after he criticised President Abdirahman Abdillahi Irro's visit to Qatar. The Maroodi Jeeb court later acquitted him for lack of evidence. These incidents highlight a growing pattern of politically motivated arrests, judicial harassment, and censorship aimed at silencing journalists and restricting public scrutiny of state officials in Somaliland.

There was another surge of mass arrests with at least 10 reporters being detained in three weeks.⁹⁵ On 27 September, police in Erigabo, Sanaag region, arrested and physically assaulted four reporters who questioned the Minister of Education, Ismail Yusuf Duale, about the closure of local schools. They were detained for seven hours and released without charge, while a fifth journalist escaped with injuries. The same day, police in Gabiley arrested journalist Mohamed Wadiin after he reported on the detention of clan elders who had criticised the government's land seizure in Wajale. He remains in custody without an arrest warrant, in violation of Somaliland's constitution.

Earlier in September, police in Burao detained *KF Media TV* journalist Abdiaziz Saleban Sulub for 18 days, allegedly on the orders of the Togdheer governor over critical reporting. Although the court later acquitted him, he remained in custody pending appeal. On 11 September, three journalists were briefly detained in Borama after covering local criticism of the regional governor during President Abdirahman Irro's visit. Separately, journalist Ahmed Mohamud Dool was imprisoned for 30 days in Hargeisa after publishing allegations of police involvement in murder cases. Despite initial optimism for reform under President Irro's leadership, Somaliland's civic space continues to shrink, with SJS documenting 24 journalist arrests and two media outlet bans in the past nine months, reflecting deepening intolerance of dissent and erosion of press freedom.⁹⁶

On 9 August 2025, the Maroodi Jeeb Appeals Court issued a new suspension order against the independent media outlet *Hadhwanaag News*, directing the reinstatement of restrictions on its websites, *hadhwanaagnews.co*, *hadhwanaagnews.ca*, and *hadhwanaagtv.com*.⁹⁷ The ruling also imposed a six-month prison sentence and a fine of 500,000 Somaliland Shillings (approximately \$50) on each of the outlet's exiled journalists and instructed local internet service providers to block access to the sites. The

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ SJS, "Somaliland: 10 journalists arrested in three weeks," 29 September 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/09/29/somaliland-10-journalists-arrested-in-three-weeks/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ SJS, "Somaliland court reinstates Hadhwanaag News website suspension, journalists sentenced in absentia," 29 September 2025, <https://sjsyndicate.org/2025/09/29/somaliland-court-reinstates-hadhwanaag-news-website-suspension-journalists-sentenced-in-absentia/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

websites had previously been suspended in September 2019 following corruption exposés implicating former Central Bank Governor Ali Ibrahim Jama (Ali Baghdadi). They were reinstated in February 2025 after a court lifted the ban.

South Sudan

General situation

On 30 May 2025, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2781, extending the arms embargo on South Sudan until 31 May 2026. The resolution maintains a ban on the supply, sale, and transfer of weapons and related military equipment to the country.⁹⁸ The decision reflects ongoing concerns about the flow of arms contributing to violence, human rights violations, and instability. It also signals frustration over the slow implementation of the 2018 peace agreement, particularly on security sector reforms and accountability measures.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk raised concerns over South Sudan's worsening human rights crisis, warning that nearly 2,000 civilians have been killed since January amid rising political tensions and renewed fighting.⁹⁹ UN data show 1,854 civilians killed, 1,693 injured, 423 abducted, and 169 subjected to sexual violence between January and September. The surge in violence stems from renewed clashes between government and opposition forces, alongside intensifying communal conflict in Warrap, Jonglei, and Upper Nile States. The SSPDF face accusations of indiscriminate airstrikes and ground assaults in populated areas that have killed civilians and destroyed homes, schools, and medical facilities. Security forces have also carried out extrajudicial killings, with at least 45 people executed in Warrap and Lakes States. Türk warned that the peace process is at risk of collapse unless authorities act to protect civilians and uphold accountability. He urged the government to ensure that the ongoing trial of First Vice President Riek Machar and his co-accused complies with international fair trial standards and remains free from political interference.

South Sudan's political tensions have deepened following the government's decision to charge suspended First Vice-President Riek Machar with murder, treason, and crimes against humanity, raising fears of renewed instability.¹⁰⁰ Justice Minister Joseph Geng Akech stated that the charges stem from a March attack by a militia allegedly linked to Machar, which killed 250 soldiers and a General in Nasir. Authorities have blocked roads leading to Machar's residence in Juba, where he has remained under house arrest since March. Seven of Machar's allies, including Petroleum Minister Puot Kang Chol and Army Deputy Chief of Staff Lt Gen Gabriel Duop Lam, face similar charges, while 13 others

⁹⁸ UN, "With 9 Members Voting in Favour, 6 Abstaining, Security Council Extends Sanctions Regime on South Sudan for One Year, Adopting Resolution 2781 (2025)," 30 May 2025, <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16077.doc.htm>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

⁹⁹ OHCHR, "South Sudan: Türk alarmed by deteriorating human rights situation amid rising violence and political tensions," 26 September 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/south-sudan-turk-alarmed-deteriorating-human-rights-situation-amid-rising>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁰⁰ BBC, "South Sudan vice-president charged with murder and treason," 12 September 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c07vkln2ezro>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

remain at large. Machar's spokesperson has dismissed the accusations as a politically motivated attempt by President Salva Kiir's allies to undermine the 2018 peace agreement that ended the civil war, arguing that the judiciary lacks independence. The Justice Minister has defended the prosecution as an assertion of accountability, but the case has heightened political mistrust amid fragile ethnic relations between the Dinka and Nuer communities. The unfolding developments risk destabilising the power-sharing government and reversing the limited progress achieved since the 2018 peace deal.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Authorities in Unity State have suspended at least 24 headteachers after they participated in a peaceful protest at the Protection of Civilians site in Bentiu, calling for the release of First Vice President Riek Machar and seven others on trial for treason and murder.¹⁰¹ The demonstration, held on 25 September, also demanded the full implementation of the 2018 peace agreement, and the establishment of a hybrid court to address war crimes. Unity State's Minister of Information, Gatwech Bipal Both, confirmed the suspensions, accusing the teachers of inciting and joining a political protest in violation of the Education Act, 2021. The indefinite suspensions raise serious concerns about the suppression of peaceful assembly and political expression in South Sudan, where public servants face growing pressure to align with government positions.

Freedom of opinion and expression

The trial of South Sudan's suspended First Vice President Riek Machar began in Juba under heavy security, with authorities imposing strict access controls that sparked concerns over transparency and accountability. Security officials blocked private media, civil society representatives, and victims' families from entering Freedom Hall, where the proceedings are underway.¹⁰² The absence of independent media and observers has drawn criticism, as many view the restrictions as evidence of the government's tightening grip on civic space and lack of openness in politically sensitive trials.

On 22 September 2025, journalist Ruot George and civil rights activist Ter Manyang Gatwech reported being assaulted, detained, and subjected to degrading treatment by police and the NSS while attempting to access or report on the trial of suspended First Vice President Riek Machar.¹⁰³ George, a freelance journalist, said he was denied entry to the courtroom, beaten, and held in a military vehicle after officers accused him of taking unauthorised photos and confiscated his equipment. Gatwech, executive director of the Centre for Peace and Advocacy, reported being physically assaulted, blindfolded, and

¹⁰¹ Sudans Post, "Unity State suspends 24 headteachers after pro-Machar demonstration," 27 September 2025, <https://www.sudanspost.com/unity-state-suspends-24-headteachers-after-pro-machar-demonstration/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁰² The East African, South Sudan blocks media, families from Machar trial, 22 September 2025, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/south-sudan-blocks-media-families-from-machar-trial-5201930>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁰³ Radio Tamazuj, "Journalist, activist report assault, brief arrest during Machar trial," 22 September 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/journalist-activist-report-assault-brief-arrest-during-machar-trial>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

threatened after identifying himself as an HRD, alleging that he was targeted based on his ethnic identity by security personnel.

On 5 October 2025, Ter Manyang Gatwech reported that the NSS is intimidating him and threatening to arrest him in retaliation for his criticism of government spending and its human rights record.¹⁰⁴ Gatwech stated that a contact within the NSS warned him about a letter authorising his arrest that could be signed at any moment. Gatwech says security agents have harassed him through suspicious phone calls asking about his whereabouts. He believes the authorities are targeting him for his recent commentary on high-profile political cases and government delegations to the UN.

Sudan

General situation

Sudan's civil war between the SAF and the RSF plunged the country into one of the world's gravest humanitarian crises. A recent report by the UN Human Rights Office highlights a sharp escalation in civilian killings, including summary executions, amid intensifying ethnic violence and a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Sudan.¹⁰⁵ Over 11 million people have been displaced, 8.6 million internally and more than 3 million as refugees, making Sudan the world's largest displacement crisis. Civilians in El-Fasher and across Darfur remain trapped under siege, facing continuous bombardment, deliberate starvation tactics, and the large-scale destruction of homes and essential infrastructure. Humanitarian aid remains severely obstructed, leaving millions without access to food, water, or medical assistance. The report attributes grave violations to both the SAF and the RSF, as well as their allied militias. It documents widespread conflict-related sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, torture, sexual slavery, and forced marriage, with women and girls, especially those displaced or from ethnic minority communities, disproportionately affected.

Ahead of the UN Human Rights Council's 60th session, DefendDefenders and dozens of NGOs urged states to support a mandate extension for the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) for Sudan.¹⁰⁶ The Council adopted Resolution A/HRC/60/L.18, extending the mandate of the Independent International FFM on Sudan for another year and strengthening its reporting and engagement, including a 2026 debate with civil society.¹⁰⁷ The resolution condemns ongoing violations of human rights

¹⁰⁴ Radio Tamazuj, "Activist says he faces arrest threats, intimidation," 5 October 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/south-sudanese-activist-says-he-faces-arrest-threats-intimidation>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁰⁵ OHCHR, "UN experts demand urgent action to protect civilians in Sudan as conflict intensifies," 3 October 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/un-experts-demand-urgent-action-protect-civilians-sudan-conflict-intensifies>, accessed on 9 October 2025.

¹⁰⁶ DefendDefenders, "Sudan: Extend the mandate of the Fact-Finding Mission for two more years," 14 August 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/sudan-extend-ffm-mandate-two-more-years/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁰⁷ DefendDefenders, "Sudan: as war rages, UN extends human rights investigations," 6 October 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/sudan-as-war-rages-un-extends-investigations/>, accessed on 9 October 2025.

and international humanitarian law. The resolution reiterated the call for a nationwide ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access. It stresses that accountability is essential for lasting peace and urges a Sudanese-led transition toward a democratic civilian government.

Freedom of opinion and expression

On 02 May 2025, the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate reported the death of Hassan Fadl Al-Mawla Musa, who was killed by RSF gunfire during their raid on the city of Nahud.¹⁰⁸ Al-Mawla worked as a broadcaster for *West Kordofan Radio* and as a correspondent for both *Sudanese Radio* and *Biladi Radio*.

Freelance photojournalist Al-Shykh Al-Samany Saadaldyn Mousa Abdulla, known as “Sheikho,” was killed in a drone strike in the Al-Butna area of central-eastern Sudan while documenting frontline developments in the ongoing conflict.¹⁰⁹ The attack also claimed the lives of at least seven soldiers from the Sudan Shield Forces and injured 14 others. Sheikho, an independent journalist with a strong online presence and more than 20,000 followers on his Facebook page, had been reporting extensively on the war’s impact and dynamics.

On 10 May, the SAF arrested freelance journalist Mounir Al-Taraiki at his home in Northern State and held him for 36 hours without charge. During his detention, he was subjected to an intense interrogation by a military investigator, who criticised his public calls for an end to the war.¹¹⁰ This incident reflects a broader pattern of repression by military and security authorities, who continue to target journalists, activists, and political figures voicing dissent or advocating for peace. Civil society groups and resistance committees report that such individuals are frequently detained or prosecuted on allegations of collaborating with the RSF, underscoring the shrinking space for free expression and independent reporting amid Sudan’s ongoing conflict.

On 25 May, SAF raided the home of journalist Abduljalil in Kassala without a warrant, arresting him and preventing him from notifying his family or collecting essential medication for his health conditions. He was held incommunicado for several hours before his family received confirmation of his detention later that night.¹¹¹ According to

¹⁰⁸ CPJ, “Sudanese journalist Hassan Fadl Al-Mawla Mousa killed as RSF seize town,” 6 May 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/05/sudanese-journalist-hassan-fadl-al-mawla-mousa-killed-as-rsf-seize-town/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁰⁹ CPJ, “Sudanese photojournalist Al-Shykh Al-Samany Saadaldyn killed in drone strike,” 20 May 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/05/sudanese-photojournalist-al-shykh-al-samany-saadaldyn-killed-in-drone-strike/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹⁰ Sudanakhbar, “Journalist arrested in Northern State over article calling for end to war,” 12 May 2025, <https://www.sudanakhbar.com/1647843>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹¹ CPJ, “Sudanese blogger Abduljalil Mohamed Abduljalil detained over corruption reporting,” 28 May 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/05/sudanese-blogger-abduljalil-mohamed-abduljalil-detained-over-corruption-reporting/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate and media reports, his arrest was linked to social media posts criticising the government, particularly allegations of corruption within the pilgrimage authority, the state body managing logistics and permits for Hajj travel. Following his arrest, his Facebook posts were removed.

In late July, the RSF detained journalist El-Rashid Mohamed Haroun at the Ardeiba market in El-Geneina, West Darfur, for unknown reasons. In August, he was transferred from an RSF detention centre to Dages Prison in South Darfur, where he remains in custody without formal charges and with his family denied visitation rights.¹¹² Haroun, who serves as the director of local radio station Darfur 90.3 and has contributed to several regional news outlets, is among several media professionals targeted amid the ongoing conflict. His continued detention without due process reflects the RSF's growing use of arbitrary arrests to suppress independent journalism and restrict information flow from conflict-affected regions of Sudan.

On 7 July, members of the Sudan Liberation Movement–Transitional Council (SLM–TC), an armed group allied with the SAF, arrested freelance journalists Nasr Yaqoub and Mohamed Ahmed Nazar from a shop in the Abu Shouk Camp market in El-Fasher, North Darfur.¹¹³ The journalists were not reporting on an event at the time but were using a Starlink device to access the internet and share updates about the war on their Facebook pages, which have 5,000 and 10,000 followers respectively. Their arrest followed an earlier incident on 5 July, when an SLM–TC member allegedly fired at Yaqoub after he refused to surrender the same Starlink device, which is vital for internet connectivity in the region. The SLM–TC later confirmed the arrests, accusing the journalists of provocation and incitement.

Alnor Suleiman Alnor, a journalist based in El-Fasher, North Darfur, died on 5 October from injuries sustained in a drone strike on his home two days earlier. The attack, reportedly carried out by the RSF, occurred amid the ongoing siege of El-Fasher. Alnor was taken to the Saudi Hospital, the only operational medical facility in the city, but succumbed to his injuries the following day.¹¹⁴ According to local sources, Alnor was among El-Fasher's most influential journalists and is believed to have been deliberately targeted for his reporting. His death reflects the heightened dangers faced by media workers in Darfur, where the RSF's siege has severely restricted access to humanitarian aid, communication networks, and safe shelter. Reports also indicate that journalists in the region face harassment, sexual violence, and retaliatory attacks for their work, further

¹¹² CPJ, "Sudanese journalist detained by paramilitary group since July," 10 September 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/09/sudanese-journalist-detained-by-paramilitary-group-since-july/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹³ CPJ, "Sudanese forces arrest journalists Nasr Yaqoub and Mohamed Ahmed Nazar in North Darfur," 8 July 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/07/sudanese-forces-arrest-journalists-nasr-yaqoub-and-mohamed-ahmed-nazar-in-north-darfur/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹⁴ CPJ, "Sudanese journalist Alnor Suleiman Alnor killed in RSF drone strike in El-Fasher," 7 October 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/10/sudanese-journalist-alnor-suleiman-alnor-killed-in-rsf-drone-strike-in-el-fasher/>, accessed on 8 October 2025.

illustrating the collapse of press freedom and protection for civilians in conflict-affected areas of Sudan.¹¹⁵

Tanzania

General situation

During the 59th session of the Human Rights Council, DefendDefenders condemned the arrest, detention, and deportation of former officials and civil society members who had travelled to Tanzania to follow the treason case of opposition leader Tundu Lissu.¹¹⁶ Among those targeted were Ugandan journalist Agather Atuhairi and Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi, who were reportedly held incommunicado, stripped naked, tortured, and sexually abused before being expelled, acts that amount to grave human rights violations requiring full investigation and accountability. The organisation warned that with elections approaching, risks of further abuses are escalating, urging UN and African mechanisms to step up scrutiny given Tanzania's regional importance. In response, Tanzania's ambassador to the UN, Dr Abdallah Possi, dismissed the allegations, insisting that the country upholds its constitutional and international obligations and pointing to its history of peaceful multiparty elections.¹¹⁷ He argued that those expelled had misrepresented their purpose of travel, breaching immigration requirements.

Tanzania's electoral process came under scrutiny after the National Electoral Commission disqualified ACT-Wazalendo's presidential candidate, Luhaga Mpina. A former minister under the late President John Magufuli, Mpina was first barred from contesting after the Registrar of Political Parties claimed his nomination breached the party's internal procedures in August.¹¹⁸ The High Court later ruled on 11 September that the commission must operate independently and accept his nomination, which it did two days later. However, on 15 September, the commission reversed its decision, citing an objection from the Attorney General.¹¹⁹

On 29 September 2025, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting intensified political repression in Tanzania ahead of the general elections scheduled for 29 October

¹¹⁵ CPJ, "Hunted, raped, starved: Sudan's journalists under siege in El-Fasher," 1 October 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/10/hunted-raped-starved-sudans-journalists-under-siege-in-el-fasher/>, accessed on 9 October 2025.

¹¹⁶ DefendDefenders, "DefendDefenders' oral statements at HRC59," 16 June 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/oral-statements-hrc59/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹⁷ All African, Tanzania Govt Rejects Human Rights Abuse Accusations, 19 June 2025, <https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00093150.html>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹⁸ The East African, "ACT Wazalendo's Mpina back on ballot after court overturns ban," 11 September 2025, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/act-wazalendo-mpina-back-on-ballot-after-court-overturns-ban-5189876>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹¹⁹ HRW, "Tanzania: Deepening Repression Threatens Elections," 29 September 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/29/tanzania-deepening-repression-threatens-elections>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

2025.¹²⁰ The report corroborated findings by Tanzanian human rights organisations and revealed a pattern of state-led intimidation and rights violations. The Legal and Human Rights Centre recorded around 100 cases of abductions and enforced disappearances between 2015 and February 2025. Human Rights Watch separately documented 10 incidents since mid-2024 in which authorities allegedly harassed, assaulted, abducted, or tortured HRDs, opposition members, lawyers, and religious leaders. The report further highlighted systematic voter suppression in Zanzibar, where thousands of voters reportedly struggled to obtain the Zanzibari identity cards required for registration and access to public services. Local officials were accused of withholding cards from individuals perceived as opposition supporters. Journalists and activists described a pervasive climate of censorship and fear, with the Tanzanian Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) cited as a key instrument of state control. The findings point to an increasingly hostile environment for political participation, free expression, and independent journalism in the run-up to the 2025 elections.

Freedom of association

In Tanzania, incidents of violence and intimidation against government critics and opposition figures continue to raise serious human rights concerns. On 2 May, unidentified individuals abducted opposition activist Mpaluka Nyagali, known as Mdude, from his home in Mbeya.¹²¹ Despite his wife filing a habeas corpus (a legal petition demanding that a detained person be brought before a court to determine whether their detention is lawful), the Mbeya High Court dismissed the case on 9 July, and his whereabouts remain unknown. The police have denied any involvement.

On 18 May 2025, former Kenyan Justice Minister and opposition leader Martha Karua, along with LSK Council member Gloria Kimani and member of the Pan-African Progressive Leaders Solidarity Network Lynn Ngugi, were detained upon arrival at Tanzania's Julius Nyerere International Airport and deported to Nairobi without explanation.¹²² A day later, former Kenyan Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, and HRDs Hanifa Adan and Hussein Khalid faced a similar fate.¹²³ The group had travelled to Dar es Salaam to attend a court hearing in a treason case against Tanzanian opposition politician Tundu Lissu. Their deportation, confirmed via public statements on X, raises serious concerns about regional commitments to freedom of movement and solidarity among East African civil society actors. The incident drew criticism from rights groups, who view it as part of

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Reuters, Kenyan rights activists denied entry to Tanzania for opposition leader's trial, 19 May 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenyan-rights-activists-denied-entry-tanzania-opposition-leaders-trial-2025-05-19/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹²³ Citizen Digital, "Ex-CJ Mutunga, activists Hanifa and Khalid detained in Tanzania," 19 May 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/article/ex-cj-mutunga-activists-hanifa-and-khalid-detained-in-tanzania-n362985>, accessed 3 October 2025.

a broader trend of shrinking civic space and intolerance toward transnational political engagement in the region.¹²⁴

On the same day, Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan journalist Agather Atuhaire arrived in Tanzania as part of a delegation to observe the trial of opposition politician Tundu Lissu. The following day, Tanzanian police and immigration officers arrested the two at the Serena Hotel in Dar es Salaam. They were held incommunicado at an undisclosed location, where they were allegedly tortured, stripped naked, and sexually assaulted by individuals believed to be from the Tanzanian military.¹²⁵ Their disappearance, particularly Mwangi's, triggered diplomatic tensions and widespread outrage across Kenya, with civil society, family members, and HRDs demanding their release. On 21 May 2025, Kenya's government formally protested the detention, citing violations of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations after repeated requests for consular access were denied.¹²⁶ He was deported the following morning by road and dumped in Ukunda.¹²⁷ He was rushed to a hospital in Diani for a medical review after preliminary observation indicated he looked injured and frail. Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu accused foreign activists of interfering in domestic affairs, while Kenya's Foreign Minister Musalia Mudavadi partially echoed her concerns, suggesting Kenyan activists sometimes provoke foreign governments. Despite this, the Police Reforms Working Group- Kenya, and LSK, condemned the alleged abuse, calling for regional and international accountability for the torture and sexual violence perpetrated against Mwangi and Atuhaire, in violation of international human rights law.¹²⁸

Similarly, on 27 July 2025, human rights activist Mwabili Mwangodi, who was reported missing in Tanzania, was found abandoned near the Kenya-Tanzania border and taken to a hospital in Mombasa after suffering torture and ill-treatment.¹²⁹ Rights groups said he was left in Lungu Lungu by suspected plainclothes Tanzanian officers before managing to

¹²⁴ X, @Amnesty Kenya, 18 May 2025, <https://x.com/AmnestyKenya/status/1924034374267183187>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹²⁵ Amnesty International, "Tanzania: Torture and Forcible Deportation of Kenyan and Ugandan Activists Must be Urgently Investigated," 27 May 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/tanzania-torture-and-forcible-deportation-of-kenyan-and-ugandan-activists-must-be-urgently-investigated/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹²⁶ The Citizen, "Kenyan activist deported after detention in Tanzania," 22 May 2025, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/east-africa-news/kenyan-activist-deported-after-detention-in-tanzania-5052850>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹²⁷ The Star, "Boniface Mwangi deported, dumped in Ukunda," 22 May 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-05-22-boniface-mwangi-deported-dumped-in-ukunda>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹²⁸ Amnesty International, "STATEMENT ON THE TORTURE, ASSAULT AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST EAST AFRICANS BONIFACE MWANGI AND AGATHER ATUHAIRE," 3 June 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/statement-on-the-torture-assault-and-sexual-violence-against-east-africans-boniface-mwangi-and-agather-atuhaire/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹²⁹ Daily Nation, "Missing activist Mwabili 'was tortured, injected with unknown substance'," 27 July 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/missing-activist-mwabili-was-tortured-injected-with-unknown-substance--5133292>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

reach Diani, where he was rescued and transferred for medical care. His family and colleagues reported that he had been interrogated about his political affiliations and activism, stripped of his travel documents and belongings, and held in isolation, where he was beaten and injected with unknown substances. Mwagodi, a vocal critic of President William Ruto and organiser of protests during Kenya's 2024 anti-finance bill demonstrations, was said to be in fragile health, with activists accusing Kenyan authorities of further intimidation at the hospital. His experience mirrors earlier cases, such as that of Boniface Mwangi and Agather Atuhairi, and underscores a troubling pattern of cross-border abductions and abuses targeting outspoken government critics in the region.

On 30 July 2025, a Tanzanian court adjourned for the fifth time the treason trial of opposition leader Tundu Lissu, intensifying concerns over political repression in the lead-up to the October general election.¹³⁰ Lissu was arrested in April 2025 and faces a capital offence that denies him bail, keeping him in custody until the trial concludes. The case stems from his "No Reforms, No Elections" campaign, which authorities allege involved spreading false information online to incite public resistance to the polls. The adjournment followed a pending High Court decision on whether prosecution witnesses could testify behind partitions, raising serious fair trial concerns.

On 12 August, the High Court dismissed Lissu's application challenging a Kisumu Resident Magistrate's Court ruling that allowed the use of secret witnesses in a separate case under the Cybercrimes Act.¹³¹ Justice Elizabeth Mkwizu maintained that the lower court had balanced fair trial rights with witness security, but defence lawyer Dr Rugemeleza Nshala criticised the decision as undermining transparency, arguing that the charges stemmed from a public speech and should not justify concealed testimony. He indicated that the defence may appeal, underscoring broader concerns about the deployment of restrictive legal provisions to constrain opposition voices.

The treason case was postponed again on 13 August to await a ruling on whether proceedings should be livestreamed once transferred to the High Court.¹³² While the prosecution insisted that banning live coverage was necessary to protect witnesses, Lissu argued that reversing the practice after preliminary hearings had been broadcast would amount to conducting the trial "in the dark" and deny the public insight into a case that carries the death penalty. On 18 August 2025, the Magistrate Court banned the live coverage of the court case, citing it would help protect civilian prosecution witnesses.¹³³

¹³⁰ HRW, "Tanzanian Opposition Leader's Trial Again Postponed," 1 August 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/08/01/tanzanian-opposition-leaders-trial-again-postponed>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³¹ The Chanzo Initiative, "High Court Approves Secret Witnesses in Another Tundu Lissu Case," 13 August 2025, <https://thechanzo.com/2025/08/13/high-court-approves-secret-witnesses-in-another-tundu-lissu-case/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³² MSN, "Prosecution wants livestreaming banned in Lissu treason trial," 14 August 2025, <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/africa/top-stories/prosecution-wants-livestreaming-banned-in-lissu-treason-trial/ar-AA1KwNpA?ocid=finance-verthp-feeds>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³³ Reuters, "Tanzania court bans live coverage of opposition leader's treason trial," 18 August 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/tanzania-court-bans-live-coverage-opposition-leaders-treason-trial-2025-08-18/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

The order prohibited live streaming, live broadcasting, and any other form of real-time online or social media distribution of proceedings. While the court framed the decision as a measure to safeguard witnesses, the restriction raises concerns about transparency and public access to justice in a politically charged case.

On 6 October 2025, the family of former diplomat and government critic Humphrey Polepole reported a violent break-in at his Dar es Salaam residence, finding the door forced open, electrical wiring cut, and traces of blood at the scene.¹³⁴ Images and videos shared by the family indicated signs of a struggle. The incident occurred less than three months after Polepole's sister was abducted, beaten, and later released in Dar es Salaam, raising fears of a pattern of intimidation. Polepole, formerly a senior member of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party, had resigned from his diplomatic post earlier in 2025 after accusing the government of undermining justice and constitutionalism. His family reported the case, and his lawyer filed a habeas corpus petition the following day. Police confirmed seizing items from his home as part of their investigation and claimed Polepole had been summoned for questioning by the DCI over online statements. While authorities said they were verifying the abduction claims, the incident underscores growing concerns over enforced disappearances, harassment of dissenting voices, and persistent impunity in Tanzania.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 16 August 2025, police in Dar es Salaam's Special Zone raided a local Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) meeting in Kibaha, Coast Region, arresting six party members and nearby residents, and seizing party documents along with cash.¹³⁵ Those detained were transferred to the Central Police Station in Dar es Salaam but were later released without explanation, raising questions over the legality of the arrests. The police also searched the meeting hall, vehicles and adjacent homes, actions that CHADEMA described as politically motivated and part of a broader campaign of intimidation against the opposition. The party condemned the raid as a misuse of state authority to undermine democratic participation and demanded public clarification from the police on the grounds for their intervention.

Freedom of opinion and expression

In May, TCRA shut down more than 80,000 websites, social media accounts, blogs, and online platforms, citing the publication of "unethical content" deemed harmful to children's mental health.¹³⁶ While the government justified the move as a measure to

¹³⁴ Amnesty International, "Tanzania: Fears mount over disappearance of government critic Humphrey Pole Pole," 8 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/tanzania-fears-mount-over-disappearance-of-government-critic-humphrey-pole-pole/>, accessed on 9 October 2025.

¹³⁵ Jamii Forums, "CHADEMA: Polisi wamevamia Kikao chetu cha ndani Kibaha, wanachama Sita wakamatwa," 17 August 2025, <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/chadema-polisi-wamevamia-kikao-chetu-cha-ndani-kibaha-wanachama-sita-wakamatwa.2377423/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³⁶ HRW, "Tanzania: Deepening Repression Threatens Elections," 29 September 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/29/tanzania-deepening-repression-threatens-elections>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

protect minors, the scale and lack of transparency surrounding the decision raised concerns about excessive regulation and censorship of online spaces.

Since May, the Tanzanian government restricted access to X, formerly known as Twitter, claiming the platform spreads pornographic content,¹³⁷ and imposed similar blocks on Clubhouse and Telegram.¹³⁸ These restrictions have narrowed digital spaces for communication and public participation, limiting citizens' ability to share and access information freely. The move indicates a broader pattern of digital control, where the state invokes moral or security concerns to justify measures that undermine freedom of expression and online civic engagement.

On 27 May, *The Chanzo*, an independent digital media outlet in Tanzania, announced that it had removed an article covering a 24 May press conference on abductions by Bishop Gwajima following a directive from TCRA.¹³⁹ The order to take down the report illustrates the increasing use of regulatory mechanisms to limit independent journalism and suppress reporting on sensitive issues.

Tanzanian authorities deregistered the Glory of Christ Church, owned by ruling party legislator Josephat Gwajima, after he publicly accused the government of human rights violations in the run-up to the October elections.¹⁴⁰ Police cordoned off the church in Dar es Salaam on 3 June as hundreds of congregants gathered to protest the decision. In its deregistration letter, the registrar of societies claimed Gwajima's sermons breached the expected conduct of religious organisations. The move followed a sermon in which Gwajima denounced arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, warning his followers to remain vigilant. His remarks came shortly after a Kenyan activist and a Ugandan counterpart reported torture by Tanzanian police following their arrest ahead of opposition leader Tundu Lissu's treason case hearings.

On 16 June in Dar es Salaam, unidentified attackers severely assaulted Japhet Matarra, a vocal government critic on X, leaving him unconscious. While receiving treatment in hospital, assailants disguised as medical staff attempted to attack him again before fleeing.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ The Citizen, "Tanzanian government confirms blocking of X (Twitter) over pornographic content," 04 June 2025, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/tanzanian-government-confirms-blocking-of-x-twitter-over-pornographic-content-5068542>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³⁸ HRW, "Tanzania: Deepening Repression Threatens Elections," 29 September 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/29/tanzania-deepening-repression-threatens-elections>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ AP News, "Tanzanian lawmaker's church shut down after he accuses government of human rights abuses," 4 June 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/tanzania-josephat-gwajima-samia-suluhu-hassan-c8d503f76be71200d79b1360cef46c90>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁴¹ HRW, "Tanzania: Deepening Repression Threatens Elections," 29 September 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/29/tanzania-deepening-repression-threatens-elections>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

On 20 June 2025, police officers detained ACT-Wazalendo women's wing chairperson, Janeth Rithe, after she criticised the government during a campaign rally, alleging that the president had misrepresented the state of the economy and that the ruling party was operating a police state.¹⁴² Rithe voluntarily presented herself to the police after officers arrived at the party's headquarters in Dar es Salaam seeking her arrest. She was held in custody before being released without charge on 23 June.

On 6 September, the TCRA suspended *JamiiForums*, a well-known online platform for public debate and whistleblowing, for 90 days.¹⁴³ The authority accused the platform of publishing content that allegedly misled the public and disrespected the government and the president.

These incident highlights the shrinking media space in Tanzania, where administrative directives are being employed to undermine press freedom and restrict the public's access to information on matters of accountability and human rights.

Uganda

General situation

President Yoweri Museveni signed the UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2025 into law, restoring the power of military courts to try civilians under certain circumstances.¹⁴⁴ The amendment reverses a Supreme Court ruling from January 2025 that had declared such trials unconstitutional. Although the revised law includes provisions requiring military court officials to have legal training and purports to guarantee their independence, it retains the core elements previously invalidated by the court. The bill's passage took place under heavy security and amid a boycott by opposition Members of Parliament who argued that it undermines judicial authority and defies the constitutional separation of powers. The government has defended the law as a necessary measure to address security threats and prevent armed dissent. However, critics, including the Uganda Law Society and human rights organisations, warn that it erodes judicial independence, entrenches the militarisation of the justice system, and could be used to intimidate or silence political opponents ahead of the 2026 elections.

On 15 September 2025, the Paris Civil Court issued a landmark ruling in the Total Uganda case, ordering Total to disclose key documents considered essential to the plaintiffs' evidence. The decision marks a major advance for affected communities and supporting organisations pursuing justice for alleged human rights violations linked to the Tilenga

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ The Citizen, "TCRA suspends JamiiForums licence over 'misleading, insulting content'," 6 September 2025, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/tcra-suspends-jamiiforums-licence-over-misleading-insulting-content--5183050>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁴⁴ BBC, "Uganda leader signs new law allowing military trials for civilians," 17 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0r1rrjzpllo>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

and EACOP projects in Uganda.¹⁴⁵ Filed in June 2023 under France's Duty of Vigilance Law by 26 affected individuals, activist Maxwell Atuhura, and five Ugandan and French organisations, the case challenges Total's failure to prevent environmental and human rights abuses. The ruling rejected Total's argument that the requested documents belonged to its subsidiaries, affirming that the parent company bears the primary duty of vigilance. The court gave Total one month to provide the missing documents or face a fine of €1,000 per day of delay. The disclosure will enable the continuation of written submissions ahead of a full hearing on the merits, expected in 2026.

Freedom of association

On 27 April 2025, Eddie Mutwe, the chief bodyguard of opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine), was abducted near Kampala by armed men, according to the National Unity Platform (NUP).¹⁴⁶ Days later, Chief of Defence Forces Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, son of President Yoweri Museveni, publicly claimed responsibility, posting on social media that Mutwe had been captured "like a grasshopper," detained "in my basement," and subjected to beatings and humiliation. His post, which included threats of further violence against the opposition, was widely condemned as evidence of impunity and the militarisation of politics in Uganda. The Uganda Law Society denounced the abduction as part of a "systematic campaign to silence dissent and crush the aspirations of young people yearning for freedom," highlighting the erosion of constitutional safeguards and civic freedoms. The Uganda Human Rights Commission subsequently issued a release order for Mutwe, underscoring state accountability concerns amid growing reports of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture targeting opposition figures ahead of the 2026 elections.

On 10 June 2025, Ugandan security forces raided the NUP headquarters in Kampala, disrupting preparations for the party's delegates' conference scheduled for the following day.¹⁴⁷ Eyewitnesses reported that police vehicles forced entry through the gates and fired live rounds into the air, causing panic and injuries among NUP supporters. Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson Patrick Onyango claimed ignorance of the incident, while NUP Secretary General David Lewis Rubongoya condemned the attack as politically motivated. The raid drew further controversy after Chief of Defence Forces Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba posted threatening remarks on social media, stating, *"I entered Kabobi's office the other day only to find weed and condoms... Now I'm going to his home! If anyone tries to fight, we will KILL!"* His comments heightened public concern over the military's

¹⁴⁵ Business & Human Rights Resource Center, "TotalEnergies megaproject in Uganda: French court orders the company to disclose documents requested by plaintiffs," 19 September 2025, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/m%C3%A9gaprojet-de-totalenergies-en-ouganda-la-justice-fran%C3%A7aise-ordonne-%C3%A0-la-multinationale-de-transmettre-des-documents-n%C3%A9cessaires/>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, "Uganda's military chief says holding opposition activist 'in my basement'," 2 May 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/2/ugandas-military-chief-says-holding-opposition-activist-in-my-basement>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁴⁷ Monitor, "NUP supporters injured as police raid party headquarters ahead of delegates' conference," 10 June 2025, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/nup-supporters-injured-as-police-raid-party-headquarters-ahead-of-delegates-conference-5077024>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

overt hostility towards opposition leaders. NUP leader Bobi Wine accused the state of violent repression, reporting injuries and arrests with no official justification provided.

On 9 August, a Ugandan court denied bail to opposition leader Kizza Besigye, who has spent nearly nine months in detention on treason charges.¹⁴⁸ Judge Emmanuel Baguma ruled that the 180-day threshold for mandatory bail began only on 21 February, when Besigye was remanded to a civilian court, leaving him 12 days short of eligibility. His lawyers argued that his detention without trial violates constitutional guarantees, but the court dismissed their submissions. While the government maintains that Besigye faces legitimate charges, rights groups and opposition claim that the continued use of treason prosecutions and procedural delays underscores how legal frameworks are being manipulated to weaken opposition voices and erode civic space in Uganda.

On 8 September 2025, police officers detained Alex Waiswa Mufumbiro, the Deputy Spokesperson of NUP, outside a Kampala magistrate's court.¹⁴⁹ Mufumbiro had attended a bail hearing for several detained NUP members, including opposition activist Eddie Mutwe, when he was reportedly "violently grabbed and pushed" into a vehicle by plain-clothed officers. Police spokesperson Kituuma Rusoke later confirmed the arrest but declined to provide reasons or details on when Mufumbiro would be brought before court. The incident adds to growing concerns over the arbitrary detention of opposition figures and the use of security agencies to intimidate political opponents ahead of the 2026 elections. NUP leaders, including Leader of the Opposition Joel Ssenyonyi, condemned the arrest as further evidence of state repression and political interference in judicial processes. This incident follows earlier controversy involving Mutwe's abduction, which Chief of Defence Forces Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba publicly acknowledged on social media before Mutwe was later charged with robbery, deepening perceptions of impunity and the politicisation of Uganda's law enforcement institutions.

On 15 September 2025, Uganda police rejected accusations from NUP that they are abducting party members, insisting that all recent arrests are lawful and based on ongoing investigations.¹⁵⁰ Police spokesperson Kituuma Rusoke stated that the claims of abductions are "false and politically motivated," arguing that arrests are a legitimate part of police operations since the force's establishment. Rusoke explained that several NUP members had been detained for allegedly engaging in unlawful military drilling and parades, offences under the Penal Code. He confirmed that ten suspects, including NUP Deputy Spokesperson Alex Waiswa Mufumbiro, had been arrested, with nine already appearing in court and another expected to be charged shortly.

¹⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, "Uganda court denies bail to opposition leader Kizza Besigye in treason case," 9 August 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/9/uganda-court-denies-bail-to-opposition-leader-kizza-besigye-in-treason-case>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁴⁹ The East African, "Police detain senior Ugandan opposition official," 8 September 2025, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/police-detain-senior-ugandan-opposition-official-5185666>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁵⁰ Nile Post, "These Are Arrests, Not Kidnap - Police say of NUP Members," 15 September 2025, <https://nilepost.co.ug/crime/287291/these-are-arrests-not-kidnap-police-say-of-nup-members>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

On 3 October 2025, two Kenyan human rights activists, Bob Njagi and Nicholas Oyoo, were reportedly abducted by armed men in Uganda while attending an opposition campaign event for NUP leader Bobi Wine.¹⁵¹ Witnesses said the activists were forced into a vehicle by four armed men and driven to an unknown location. Bobi Wine condemned the incident, describing it as a politically motivated abduction carried out “mafia-style” and accused the Ugandan government of targeting the pair for associating with him. Ugandan police spokesperson Kituuma Rusoke denied that the two were in police custody, while army spokesperson Felix Kulayigye dismissed the claims as unverified allegations involving unidentified operatives. The Kenyan government confirmed it was working to secure their release, with Interior Minister Kipchumba Murkomen reaffirming Kenya’s duty to protect its citizens abroad. In a joint open letter to the Ugandan High Commission, the LSK, Amnesty International Kenya, and Vocal Africa condemned the incident as part of a broader pattern of abductions and enforced disappearances targeting activists and opposition supporters in the region.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

The continued detention of 11 environmental activists protesting the EACOP highlights Uganda’s growing misuse of the judicial system to suppress dissent. On 23 April 2025, the #KCB11 attempted to peacefully deliver a letter to the Kenyan Commercial Bank (KCB) Kampala branch, expressing concern over its financing of EACOP. Although initially received by a bank official, they were deceitfully led to the basement, where police officers ambushed and arrested them.¹⁵² The activists were charged with criminal trespass, a minor offence under Ugandan law, and remanded to Luzira Maximum Security Prison, where they have been repeatedly denied bail. Court proceedings have been marred by irregularities and deliberate delays, including adjournments on 27 May due to a state event and on 12 June following the unexplained removal of the case file. The handling of the #KCB11 case exemplifies the state’s weaponisation of the law to criminalise environmental activism and deter public opposition to extractive projects.

On 19 May 2025, the Chief Magistrates’ Court of Kampala heard the case against cyberactivist and Freedom Hive Uganda Executive Director, Ssuuna James. Police witness Nduhura Samson, who led Ssuuna’s violent arrest, testified that Ssuuna had disturbed public peace by shouting “#FreeOurConstitution” and “Stop Molesting Our Constitution” during a peaceful protest on 10 February 2025.¹⁵³ Ssuuna faces a charge of common nuisance under Section 148(1) of the Penal Code. The court adjourned the case to 23 June for the prosecution’s second witness. His arrest involved excessive force, causing serious

¹⁵¹ BBC, “Kenyan activists abducted in Uganda, opposition leader says,” 3 October 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0kn205174po>, accessed on 7 October 2025.

¹⁵² FIDH, “Uganda: Arbitrary arrest and detention of 11 Ugandan environmental rights defenders,” 20 June 2025, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/uganda-arbitrary-arrest-and-detention-of-11-ugandan-environmental>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁵³ FIDH, “Uganda : Stop judicial harassment against human rights defender Ssuuna James,” 16 May 2025, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/uganda/uganda-stop-judicial-harassment-against-human-rights-defender-ssuuna>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

injuries and lasting trauma, while repeated delays in proceedings highlight judicial harassment. Ssuuna has since received online threats, including one on 4 May referencing the torture of government critics, underscoring the growing repression of HRDs in Uganda.

On 28 August 2025, police in Mityana District used tear gas to disperse supporters of the People's Front for Freedom (PFF) who were marching from Mityana Town to Busimbi to inaugurate the party's first sub-regional offices in Buganda.¹⁵⁴ The procession, led by senior party officials including Dr Lulume Bayigga, Ibrahim Ssemujju Nganda, and Waswa Birigwa, was halted by District Police Commander, who claimed the gathering lacked official clearance. Despite the peaceful nature of the march, police fired tear gas to break up the crowd, injuring several supporters. Following the standoff, authorities allowed a small delegation to proceed with the opening ceremony. Earlier that day, the party had held the Buganda Federal State Convention, during which new leaders were elected. Dr Bayigga criticised the police for obstructing lawful political activity and demanded the release of detained PFF leaders. The incident reflects a broader pattern of state interference in opposition mobilisation, highlighting persistent restrictions on freedom of assembly and association in Uganda's pre-election environment and raising concerns about the fairness of the political landscape ahead of the polls.

On 10 September 2025, a protest in Mpigi district's Muduuma Sub-County escalated into violence when supporters of the NUP clashed over internal party disagreements. The demonstrators, mainly NUP youth, were protesting against Mawokota North MP Hillary Kiyaga (Dr Hilderman), accusing him and other senior party officials, including Butambala Woman MP Aisha Kabanda, of manipulating the party's flag bearer selection process ahead of the local council elections.¹⁵⁵ The protesters claimed the decision to endorse another candidate unfairly excluded their preferred aspirant, Ivan Kasumba. When they marched to Kiyaga's residence, believing he was inside, they were confronted by his supporters, sparking violent confrontations between the two groups.

On 01 October 2025, residents of Kalagi-Kakoola town, Mukono District, staged a violent protest over a month-long power blackout, accusing the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Limited (UEDCL) of removing a transformer and failing to replace it. The protesters blocked the Mukono-Kayunga road with electricity poles and logs, paralysing transport and vowing not to disperse until power was restored.¹⁵⁶ The situation escalated when residents seized a UEDCL vehicle, demanding the transformer's immediate return. Police and army officers attempted to disperse the crowd using tear gas after negotiations failed. During the clashes, a woman sustained critical injuries from a tear gas canister and

¹⁵⁴ Monitor, "Police fire tear gas to block PFF supporters in Mityana," 29 August 2025, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/police-fire-tear-gas-to-block-pff-supporters-in-mityana-5171270>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁵⁵ HRNJU, "Journalist Assaulted During NUP Protest in Mpigi," 17 September 2025, <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10234>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁵⁶ Nile Post, "Mukono: Police Fire Teargas to Quell Protest Over Month-Long Power Outage," 2 October 2025, <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/291845/mukono-police-fire-teargas-to-quell-protest-over-month-long-power-outage>, accessed on 7 October 2025.

was taken to Naggalama Hospital. The standoff lasted over five hours before area MP Kiwanuka Abdallah Mulimamayuni intervened, pledging that the transformer would be reinstated. Such violent demonstrations undermine legitimate grievances and erode opportunities for constructive dialogue with authorities.

Freedom of opinion and expression

On 19 June 2025, security operatives in Wakiso district arbitrarily arrested and assaulted journalist Tonny Ngabo, a correspondent with *89.2 CBS FM*, while he was covering youth elections in Magere-Kasangati. Ngabo reported that officers forced him into a police vehicle known as a “drone” and later pushed him out, causing injuries to his right ankle.¹⁵⁷ The incident occurred amid tensions between the NRM and the NUP, following allegations of electoral malpractice during the national youth elections organised by the Electoral Commission. The attack reflects the growing risks faced by journalists covering politically sensitive events in Uganda.

In July 2025, investigative journalist Canary Mugume of *NBS Television* was violently attacked by unidentified assailants in Kampala. The attackers pulled him from his car late at night, assaulted him, and took only his mobile phone, leaving other valuables untouched, suggesting the incident was targeted rather than a robbery.¹⁵⁸ Mugume described the attack as the second of its kind, both incidents appearing to focus on seizing his phones. Notably, two months earlier, he had publicly shared a warning from Apple alerting him to a possible hacking attempt using mercenary spyware allegedly deployed by state actors against journalists and activists.

On 19 August 2025, journalist Christopher Semakula of *Bbeg Media* was brutally assaulted by a mob while covering a land dispute in Nakulabye, Lubaga Division, Kampala.¹⁵⁹ Semakula had gone to the scene after receiving information about a family meeting concerning the contested property. When court bailiffs attempted to enter the premises, some family members accused him of land grabbing and attacked him, seizing his phone, camera, and other equipment. Police later intervened, taking him to Old Kampala Police Station and then to Mulago National Referral Hospital, where he was treated for serious injuries, including a dislocated hand and head trauma. He was discharged on 21 August, but he continues to suffer from severe pain and swelling. This attack reflects a growing pattern of violence against journalists in Uganda by non-state actors.

¹⁵⁷ HRNJU, “Journalist Injured After Arrest While Covering Youth Elections in Wakiso,” 20 June 2025, <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10213>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹⁵⁸ Business & Human Rights Resource Center, “Uganda: New report details surveillance and spyware network that is endangering journalists and human rights activists,” 11 August 2025, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/uganda-new-report-details-surveillance-and-spyware-network-that-is-endangering-journalists-and-human-rights-activists/>, accessed 3 on October 2025.

¹⁵⁹ HRNJU, “Journalist Beaten by Mob in Kampala, Rushed to Hospital,” 20 August 2025, <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10227>, accessed on 3 October 2025.

During the protest in Mpigi district's Muduuma Sub-County, NTV journalist Brian Adam Kesiime, was attacked by an unidentified protester while covering the demonstration. He sustained injuries and was rushed to a nearby health facility for treatment.¹⁶⁰ The assault highlights the growing risks faced by journalists covering politically charged events in Uganda, where hostility from both state and non-state actors continues to threaten press freedom and the right to information.

¹⁶⁰ HRNJU, "Journalist Assaulted During NUP Protest in Mpigi," 17 September 2025, <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10234>, accessed on 3 October 2025.