

## Safeguarding civic and political space and pursuing democratic processes in sub-Saharan Africa

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisations in Africa, meeting at its 42<sup>nd</sup> World Congress in Bogota, wish to draw the Federation's attention to the continuing deterioration of civic space and democratic processes in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Reaffirming** the essential importance of free, transparent, inclusive and fair elections for consolidating democracy and promoting sustainable development;

**Recalling** the commitments made by African States under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

**Recalling** the provisions of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which promote the values and principles of democracy, good governance and human rights;

**Recalling** that freedom of expression is a fundamental right, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and that it is closely linked to freedom of peaceful assembly, enshrined in Article 20 of the Declaration and Article 21 of the Covenant, particularly in relation to demonstrations, pickets, marches, rallies and parades;

**Expressing** their deep concern at the increasing number of violations of civil and political rights, in particular the growing restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association, especially before, during and after elections;

**Alarmed** by the widespread repression of independent and dissenting voices, acts of intimidation against human rights defenders, arbitrary arrests, the use of the criminal justice system and independent constitutional commissions and bodies as a weapon against dissenting voices, and the enforced disappearances of journalists, political opponents and members of civil society organisations;

**Concerned about** the increasing restrictions on civic and democratic space, freedom of expression and freedom of demonstration in the run-up to several general elections, particularly in a tense political context a few weeks before the October 2025 presidential election in **Côte d'Ivoire**, the December 2025 elections in **Guinea**, the April 2026 elections in **Benin** and the June 2026 elections in **Ethiopia**;

**Concerned** by the adoption of the bill ratifying Ordinance No. 2024-368 of 12 June 2024 on the organisation of civil society in Côte d'Ivoire, which increases the authorities' control over civil society organisations under the guise of combating terrorism and money laundering, providing for particularly severe penalties such as imprisonment, heavy fines and the dissolution of organisations deemed non-compliant;

**SAFEGUARDING CIVIC AND POLITICAL SPACE AND PURSUING DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES  
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA****2/4**

**Concerned** about the climate of [widespread repression](#) targeting all forms of dissent in the public sphere in **Togo**, illustrated by the systematic banning of peaceful demonstrations and the numerous [arbitrary arrests](#) that followed the crackdown on demonstrations in June 2025, after the [constitutional coup](#) perpetrated in March 2024 by the regime of Faure Gnassingbé, granting the latter power for life;

**Deeply concerned** by the continuing deterioration of the civil and political rights situation in **Benin**, characterised by violence, arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions targeting political opponents, trade union leaders and peaceful demonstrators, particularly in the context of elections and social mobilisation, and aggravated by restrictive legislation reflecting a growing desire to control civic space and limit the freedom of action and expression of associations, journalists and engaged citizens;

**Noting** the persistent impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these violations and **alarmed** by the increased censorship and systematic surveillance of the media and digital platforms, resulting in the suspension of newspapers, independent news sites and social media accounts critical of the authorities in many sub-Saharan African countries;

**Concerned** about the [situation](#) of political opponent Lassy Mbouity following his abduction and detention in May 2025, during which he was reportedly subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and about the intensification of repressive practices against dissenting voices in the run-up to the presidential election in **the Republic of the Congo**;

**Deeply concerned** by the increasing repression, including at the judicial level, against [human rights defenders](#), including environmental defenders, and the low level of awareness among voters in **Uganda** in the run-up to the general elections in January 2026;

**Concerned** about the [worrying resurgence](#) of political intolerance and repression, manifested in abductions, enforced disappearances, [cases of torture](#) and targeted violence against opposition figures and civil society, as illustrated in particular by the cases of Agather Atuhaire and Boniface Mwangi in **Tanzania**, following the 2024 local elections and in the run-up to the October 2025 general elections;

**Concerned about** the climate of fear and intimidation prevailing in **Burundi**, fuelled by persistent violations, including abductions and enforced disappearances, summary executions, acts of torture, arbitrary arrests and detentions committed with impunity, as well as restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular freedom of expression, in the current electoral context;

**Concerned** about post-election [police violence](#) that left several people dead and injured in October 2024 in Mozambique, and recalling the need for [justice, truth and reparation](#) for the victims of this post-election violence;

**Concerned** about the [ongoing attacks on civic space](#) in **Zimbabwe**, including the recent adoption of [the Private Voluntary Organisations \(PVO\) Act](#);

**Concerned** about the irregularities observed during the elections in Tanzania, Burundi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and noting the need to strengthen electoral transparency and integrity, as well as respect for civic participation in democratic processes before, during and after elections;

**Dismayed** by numerous cases of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions in **Guinea**, including those of Oumar Sylla, known as Foniké Mengué, and Mamadou Billo Bah, FNDC leaders who were arrested in July 2024 and remain missing more than a year after their night-time abduction by special forces; Habib Marouane Camara, an investigative journalist, abducted on 3 December 2024, with no news to date; and Abdoul Sacko, spokesperson for the Forces Sociales de Guinée, abducted on the night of 18-19 February 2025 and found seriously injured near a military camp in Forécariah, currently being treated abroad; and former Bar President Mohamed Traoré, who was also abducted on the night of 20 to 21 June 2025 and tortured for publicly criticising the military regime in power;

**SAFEGUARDING CIVIC AND POLITICAL SPACE AND PURSUING DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES  
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA****3/4**

**Denouncing** the growing trend of repression against civil society and human rights defenders in **Kenya**, illustrated by the expulsion in July 2025 of Martin Mavunjina, senior legal adviser to the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) on transitional justice, without due process, and by the excessive and often lethal use of force during demonstrations against corruption. **Reiterating their condemnation** of police brutality during the crackdown on youth protests in 2024 and 2025, which resulted in more than 1,400 illegal arrests, more than 150 deaths and 89 enforced disappearances. Alarmed by the fact that, despite repeated calls from civil society and international actors for accountability, investigations remain at a standstill and impunity persists;

**Concerned about** the rise of repression in East Africa, including in the electoral context, where opposition political leaders are accused of treason (in Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, the DRC and South Sudan), and by the transnational nature of repression in the region;

**Seriously concerned** about the escalating [repression of civil society](#) in **Ethiopia**, including the arbitrary suspension of independent human rights organisations on vague and extra-legal grounds by the Agency for Civil Society Organisations (ACSO), in violation of national procedural safeguards under Proclamation No. 1113/2019 and regional and international principles. **Alarmed** by the broader pattern of intimidation, surveillance and forced exile of human rights defenders; «Particularly concerned about the upcoming elections scheduled for June 2026, in a context of ongoing tensions and instability in the regions of Tigray, Amhara and Oromia, against a backdrop of increased restrictions on civic space with the new draft proclamation on CSOs;

*The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisations in Africa make the following recommendations:*

- **To States:**
  - i. Guarantee an open, inclusive and secure civic space that allows for free expression, independent civil society action and citizen engagement, including and especially during election periods;
  - ii. Fully respect, protect and promote the civil and political rights of all, ensuring equitable access to political participation, freedom of opinion and expression, and the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association;
  - iii. Ensure that electoral processes take place in a peaceful, transparent, fair and truly participatory climate, including political parties, independent candidates, civil society organisations and all citizens;
  - iv. Put an immediate end to repression and human rights violations committed in the context of protests or elections;
  - v. Ensure the effective protection of human rights defenders, journalists, election observers, political activists and members of civil society against all forms of threat, intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest or violence;
  - vi. Ensure that any regulation of digital and social media during elections strictly complies with international standards on freedom of expression and is not used in any way to limit public debate or hinder the transparency of the electoral process;
  - vii. Publicly denounce serious human rights violations committed during electoral processes, open investigations and prosecute perpetrators, including within the defence and security forces and the state apparatus;

---

SAFEGUARDING CIVIC AND POLITICAL SPACE AND PURSUING DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES  
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

---

4/4

- **To the African Union and technical and financial partners:**
  - i. **Strengthen** early warning and rapid response mechanisms in response to restrictions on civic and political space;
  - ii. **Support** independent citizen monitoring of electoral processes and actions to strengthen democratic governance;
  - iii. Publicly **denounce** any serious violations of civil and political rights;
  - iv. **Express** concern about the prolonged terms of office of presidents in power in certain African countries and call for a review of constitutional term limits and the promotion of democratic transitions, in accordance with existing regional and international instruments;

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisations in Africa reaffirm their commitment to:

- **Actively defend** civic space and fundamental freedoms in their respective contexts and globally;
- **Document**, alert and denounce any form of obstruction or violence related to electoral processes;
- **Encourage and promote** citizen participation, particularly that of women, young people and marginalised groups, in political life.