



Submission to the Fourth Cycle of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of the United Republic of Tanzania.

For Consideration at the 53rd Session of the UPR Working Group

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Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. We defend the right of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal.

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Executive Summary

1. As an organization promoting freedom of expression and the rule of law, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has focused this submission on the United Republic of Tanzania's compliance with international human rights obligations related to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the press, and assesses progress made since the last review in 2021.
2. This submission draws primarily on CPJ research into the legal and extra-legal pressures facing journalists and media outlets in Tanzania.¹ Over the past five years, despite official rhetoric² suggesting greater openness, authorities have continued to deploy restrictive laws³ to target journalists and media houses.
3. This submission also highlights Tanzania's failure to repeal or meaningfully amend laws that criminalize journalism as well as the continued lack of accountability for abuses against members of the press, such as the unresolved 2017 disappearance of investigative journalist Azory Gwanda.⁴
4. CPJ submits that these violations reflect a broader environment in which press freedom remains fragile and vulnerable to executive control.
5. CPJ recommends that Tanzanian authorities align all media-related laws with international and regional human rights standards, provide a credible and transparent update on the investigation into Azory Gwanda's disappearance and other violations against journalists, and ensure that journalist accreditation and licensing are free of political interference and are not weaponized to deny foreign press access to the country or to bar local journalists from the profession.

Implementation of recommendations from the previous UPR

6. This submission addresses at least 26 of the recommendations that the United Republic of Tanzania received during the Third Cycle UPR (November 2021, 39th session).⁵ These recommendations focused on safeguarding freedom of expression, ensuring the safety of journalists, and reforming restrictive legislation. CPJ finds that Tanzania has made inadequate progress in implementing the assessed recommendations, including the 11 that the country supported. A detailed analysis of these recommendations is included in the annex.

Legal Framework

8. Article 18 of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information.⁶
9. Tanzania is a party to key regional and international instruments, including the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (EAC)⁷, the African Charter on

Human and Peoples' Rights⁸, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁹, which require the protection of freedom of expression and access to information.

Main Submission

10. After Samia Suluhu Hassan assumed the presidency in March 2021, Tanzania initially signaled¹⁰ a more open environment for media and civil society. Some previously banned outlets resumed operations.¹¹
11. However, these early gains proved fragile and inconsistent. Within months, authorities reverted to previous practice, relying on restrictive laws and administrative actions to control the media. Journalists reporting critically on government actions faced intimidation, arrest and detention¹² while media outlets risked suspension or fines¹³ under existing regulatory frameworks. The media environment grew more hostile in the run up to the general elections in 2025, and CPJ documented grievous attacks on journalists in the wake of the polls.¹⁴

Legislative Environment and Censorship

12. In the period under review, Tanzania maintained a punitive media law framework. Laws cited as problematic during the previous review remained unchanged or were subjected to amendments that were either cosmetic or that made them more stringent.
13. The Online Content Regulations, initially enacted under the Electronic and Postal Communications Act (EPOCA) in 2018 and amended in 2020¹⁵, require the licensing of bloggers and YouTubers, and prohibit publication of information on broad and vague grounds. In the period under review, the regulations have been amended at least twice.
14. In 2022 changes¹⁶ to the regulations, authorities narrowed the scope¹⁷ of licensing requirements and reduced fees levied but maintained registration requirements and content prohibitions.¹⁸ January 2025 amendments¹⁹ introduced requirements for Internet Service Providers to filter prohibited content when ordered to do so by the state.²⁰
15. Regulators continued to use the Online Content Regulations to sanction and silence critical media outlets. The regulations were cited in the July 2022 suspension of the online news outlet DarMpya²¹ and again 2024 when authorities ordered three newspapers associated with Mwananchi Communications Limited to stop publishing online for a month.²²
16. In September 2025, weeks before a general election, Tanzanian authorities suspended the popular discussion and news platform JamiiForums for 90 days, alleging breach of the regulations through the publication of statements made by a politician critical of the government.²³

17. In 2019, the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) directed the overhaul of Tanzania's 2016 Media Services Act²⁴, on grounds that the law's criminalization of speech was incompatible with the constitutive treaty of the EAC.²⁵ In a positive development, 2023 amendments to the law partially implemented this order by removing criminal penalties for defamation through the repeal of sections that stipulated prison time for publications "injurious to the reputation, rights and freedom of other persons".²⁶
18. However, these 2023 amendments failed to meet the compliance standards set by the EACJ judgment, as well as international and regional human rights standards. This is in part because the Media Services Act maintained criminal penalties for publication of materials with "seditious intention" as well as for broadly defined offenses related to the publication of false news or statements that threaten state interests.
19. Also maintained were stringent accreditation regulations, requiring higher education qualifications and stipulating prison time for those convicted of practicing journalism without accreditation. As of early 2026, authorities began a crackdown on unaccredited journalists operating in Tanzania, according to media reports.²⁷
20. In October 2025, authorities in the semi-autonomous Zanzibar islands cited local broadcasting laws to accuse at least 11 media houses of operating without licenses, weeks ahead of the country's elections.²⁸
21. During that general election, authorities imposed a five-day Internet blackout²⁹, following months of blocking access³⁰ to the social media platform X.
22. Authorities have maintained sections of the Cybercrimes Act³¹ that undermine freedom of information, including clauses criminalizing the publication of false news that defames others and have been used previously to target journalists.³² This remains the case despite recommendations to amend this law going dating back to the Second Cycle (2016) UPR.³³
23. The laws discussed in this section were sometimes used to arrest and prosecute journalists for their work, as this submission will demonstrate in subsequent sections.

Arrests and Attacks Against Journalists

24. Journalists continued to face arrest, violence and harassment in connection to their work. Violations against journalists were characterized by impunity.
25. The unresolved disappearance of journalist Azory Gwanda, who was last seen in November 2017, remains a stark symbol of impunity. During the period under the review, the state continued its failure to provide a definitive account of his fate or to launch an independent inquiry into his disappearance.³⁴
26. In August and September 2024, several reporters were detained³⁵ while covering opposition activities and protests, reflecting a pattern of restricting media coverage of politically sensitive issues.³⁶

27. On January 12, 2025, Tanzanian journalist and activist Maria Sarungi Tsehai was abducted in Nairobi, Kenya, and held for about four hours by men who claimed to be police.³⁷ In the suspected case of transnational repression, Sarungi Tsehai said that she believed there was Tanzanian involvement in the incident and that the assailants intended to force her back to Tanzania. Sarungi Tsehai left Tanzania in 2021 amid safety concerns.
28. On June 20, 2025, police arrested podcasters Jackson Martine Kabalo³⁸ and Joseph Chaviruka Mrindoko³⁹ in Arusha. Two days later, they pleaded not guilty to charges of publishing false information and providing online content without a license and were granted bail. The duo's Wachokonozi podcast features satirical and critical commentary on Tanzanian politics, economics, and culture, and their arrest was in part connected to their critical commentary on governance and economic issues. Even though a court discontinued their case July 21, they were re-arrested and charged with breach of EPOCA and the Cybercrimes Act and granted bail. Their case was ongoing at the time of writing.
29. In May 2025, security personnel in Dar es Salaam arrested Ugandan Agather Atuhaire and Kenyan Boniface Mwangi, both journalists and activists, after they travelled to the country to observe the trial of opposition politician Tundu Lissu.⁴⁰ Atuhaire and Mwangi were held for several days, and they would later say that they were tortured – including by being beaten and subjected to sexual assault – acts their captors reportedly filmed for the purpose of blackmail.⁴¹ After being dumped at their respective borders in a state of physical collapse, both went public with their ordeal, leading to a landmark human rights case filed at the East African Court of Justice to hold the Tanzanian government accountable for these "unprecedented" abuses.⁴²
30. On September 6, 2025, Jambo TV journalists Baraka Lucas and Manara TV reporter Nicco Mollel were arrested in Arusha, on allegations of operating an unregistered online television channel in breach of EPOCA and later released on bail on September 12.⁴³
31. CPJ documented⁴⁴ a "suffocating climate of fear" among journalists, following a brutal government crackdown⁴⁵ in the wake of Tanzania's October 29, 2025 general elections. At least three journalists were killed on election day, as the State violently suppressed protests: Kelvin Lameck (Baraka FM) in the southern city of Mbeya; Master Tindwa Mtopa (Clouds Media), killed at his home in Dar es Salaam; and freelancer Maneno Selanyika, killed near his home, also in Dar es Salaam.
32. While the exact circumstances and motives surrounding the journalists' killings remain unclear, the incidents marked a rare and alarming escalation, as Tanzania had not recorded the fatal shooting of a journalist since 2012, according to CPJ research.⁴⁶ The State's failure to account for these killings also echoes the murkiness and lack of accountability surrounding the killings of civilians during that post-election period, with

different estimates indicating that as few as several hundred⁴⁷ or as many as 3,000⁴⁸ people died.

33. CPJ also documented the arrest of at least three journalists in the election aftermath:
- Godfrey Thomas Ng’omba, a bureau chief with the online news outlet Ayo TV, was detained on election day, held for six days, rearrested, and later charged with treason —charges that carry the death penalty.⁴⁹ Ng’omba was released later that month after authorities withdrew charges of treason against him and hundreds of others, following a presidential directive.⁵⁰
 - Kenyan journalist Shoka Juma was arrested by Tanzanian security personnel at the border between the two countries, held briefly, and accused of espionage before being released unconditionally.
 - Alphonse Kusaga who runs the online media outlet Kusaga TV and reports for Arusha-based Sunrise Radio, was arrested on November 4 and released on bail the following day.⁵¹

Recommendations

34. The disappearance of journalist Azory Gwanda and all other attacks on journalists should be credibly investigated. The Tanzanian government must hold those responsible to account in fair and transparent proceedings.
35. Authorities must desist from arresting and prosecuting journalists and bloggers in connection with their work.
36. Tanzania should comply fully with the 2019 East African Court of Justice judgment directing amendment of the Media Services Act.
37. Authorities should also amend other laws that criminalize journalism and impose undue licensing requirements including the Electronic Postal and Communications Act as well as its Online Content Regulations and the Cybercrimes Act.
38. Pending the amendments of these laws, a moratorium should be imposed on the enforcement of sections that criminalize speech and require licensing of bloggers and journalists.
39. The government must ensure that journalists, including the international press corps, are granted the access they need to cover matters of public interest.
40. Authorities must desist from disrupting internet access particularly during elections or periods of political tension

Endnotes

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