



JOINT STATEMENT BY THE CONSORTIUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND MEDIA IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (CHARM) ON RISING THREATS TO CIVIC SPACE AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Date: 10 July 2025

The Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development in Sub-Saharan Africa ([CHARM](#)), a consortium committed to advancing human rights, protecting civic space, and promoting media freedom, is concerned about recent incidents affecting civic actors, journalists, and civil society organizations across Sub-Saharan Africa. CHARM is a vibrant alliance of seven partners **DefendDefenders, CIVICUS, Civil Rights Defenders, Fojo Media Institute, Magamba Network, Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (RFLD), and Wits Journalism** united by a shared mission and strategic vision.

CHARM acknowledges recent steps taken by some African states to improve civic space and human rights protections. These examples demonstrate that progress is possible through dialogue and cooperation. As a consortium, CHARM is committed not only to identifying gaps but also to supporting governments and civil society in creating inclusive, rights-respecting societies. We remain ready to collaborate in advancing civic space and media freedom across Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, we have noted worrying trends across the region with concern. Civic space continues to shrink, with growing incidents of violence against protesters, intimidation of activists and journalists, arbitrary detention, and tighter restrictions on media and civil society. Yet, amid these challenges, there have been promising strides toward openness and reform in several countries. In **Zambia**, sustained civil society advocacy contributed to the [repeal of the death penalty](#) and the passing of the [Access to Information Act](#) a major democratic milestones after decades of resistance. In **Rwanda**, gender desks and anti-harassment policies were established in media houses, culminating in the [Kigali Declaration](#) a continental benchmark for gender safety in journalism. Meanwhile, **Zimbabwe** introduced [legal reforms](#) enabling community radio stations to access foreign funding, strengthening local civic voices. These examples show that progress is possible, but the challenges remain urgent and require collective action to protect and expand civic space.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS (2025)



Kenya

[Public demonstrations](#) in Kenya held to mark the anniversary of the 2024 Finance Bill Protests resulted in at least 16 deaths and over 400 serious injuries. Members of civil society, including the Africa Rising Consortium, were among those arrested. [Media coverage](#) was deliberately suppressed when the Communication Authority reportedly ordered all media houses to halt live reporting of the 25 June 2025 protests and switched off three independent television stations, a move widely condemned as unlawful and contrary to press freedom. Allegations of live ammunition use, detention without trial, and individuals being held incommunicado without legal or family contact represent serious violations of rights. These developments raise critical concerns over the use of excessive force, suppression of free expression, and the erosion of due process.

Zimbabwe

Recent developments in Zimbabwe reflect a pattern of repression targeting journalists, civil society leaders, and political activists. Faith Zaba, editor of the *Zimbabwe Independent*, was arrested over a satirical article, while Blessed Mhlanga of *NewsDay* was detained for 72 days after reporting on a press conference calling for protest. Additionally, the [Zimbabwe Peace Project Report](#) documented that over 1,500 people were affected by political violence during recent by-elections, with 14 human rights violations, including harassment, intimidation, and physical assault. These incidents highlight the ongoing threats to press freedom and citizens' ability to participate safely in public life.

Togo

On 26 June 2025, at least [seven people were killed](#) during anti-government protests reportedly triggered by a worsening cost-of-living crisis. Civil society groups have accused security forces of engaging in arbitrary arrests, physical assaults, and the destruction of private property. Among the deceased were two minor brothers, whose bodies were found in the Nyekonakpoe neighborhood of Lomé. In addition, reports have emerged of torture, denial of justice, and abuse in detention of civic actors. [Amnesty International](#) has called for an immediate end to the excessive use of force against protesters and urged the Togolese government to ensure accountability.

Tanzania

Despite a more moderate tone from national leadership, civic space in Tanzania remains highly restricted. On April 9, 2025, the opposition leader [Tindu Lissu](#) was arrested on treason charges linked to a speech interpreted as incitement. As part of a regional observer delegation, Boniface Mwangi (Kenya) and Agather Atuhaire (Uganda) were arbitrarily [arrested](#) and tortured while in custody.

Broader patterns of arbitrary detention, intimidation, and digital surveillance of civic actors continue, alongside bureaucratic restrictions on media and community organizations. These raise deep concerns regarding freedom of expression, due process, and the right to peaceful assembly.



Call to Action

CHARM emphasizes the urgent need for governments to uphold national, regional, and international human rights obligations by:

- Respecting and protecting freedom of expression, assembly, and association.
- Ensuring fair treatment and due process for all detainees, including access to legal representation.
- Facilitating independent, transparent investigations into human rights violations, with full accountability
- Exercise restraint in managing public protests and prioritize dialogue.
- Release individuals detained without lawful justification and guarantee fair trial rights. All false charges against HRDs should be immediately dropped.
- Investigate abuse impartially and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Amend restrictive laws that limit civic participation and media freedom.

We also urge regional bodies such as the Africa Union (AU), The East Africa Community (EAC), The Southern African Development Community (SADC), and The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to:

- Speak out in support of human rights and democratic principles.
- Reinforce regional transparency and accountability mechanisms.
- Provide protection and resources for human rights defenders and journalists at risk.
- Ensure that international cooperation is based on clear human rights commitments.

Signed,

The Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development in Sub-Saharan Africa ([CHARM](#))

