



2 September 2024

To: UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association
UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression
UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders
UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances
United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

By email:

hrc-sr-freeassembly@un.org; grsrfoaa@gmail.com; vanessa.asensioperez@un.org;
bethany.hender@un.org; hrc-sr-freedex@un.org ; laurens.vanderwoude@un.org ; thibaut.guillet@un.org
hrc-sr-defenders@un.org ; marylawlorunsr@protonmail.com ; edodonovan@protonmail.com ;
orsolya.toth@un.org ; sophie.helle@un.org ; hrc-wg-eid@un.org; auabalde@gmail.com;
koat.aleer@un.org; hrc-sr-torture@un.org; hrc-wg-ad@un.org

Dear Honourable Special Mandate Holders,

Re: Intensifying Crackdown on Opposition Political Parties and Civil Society in Tanzania

This is a joint communication from Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, Umoja Empowerment Resources (UER), African Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders, Civic

Space Network, ICJ Kenya Section, Pan Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, Kenya National Coalition and ¹

We write to bring your urgent attention to the ongoing and escalating crackdown, and perpetration of gross human rights violations including enforced disappearances, against opposition political parties, civil society organisations, journalists and human rights defenders in Tanzania.²

President Samia Suluhu Hassan's accession to power in March 2021, following the passing of former President Magufuli, raised hopes for more open and democratic governance in Tanzania. However, ahead of the current administration facing its first local and general elections in November 2024 and October 2025 respectively, the Tanzanian authorities are brutally and systematically closing civic and political space. On 11 August 2024, in the lead up to International Youth Day on 12 August, Tanzanian security forces [arrested and detained more than 500 people](#), including senior leaders of the main opposition party *Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo* (CHADEMA); with reports of police brutality, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and unlawful confiscation of personal property. Widespread reports of enforced disappearances, particularly of young people, are also leading to protests, and restrictions of free expression, both off and online. This follows similar reports of [arbitrary arrests, harassment and intimidation](#) of opposition political activists, lawyers, indigenous communities, and other civil society actors throughout 2023, effectively [silencing dissent](#) and criticism of the state.

These actions undermine democratic principles and constitute severe violations of international human rights law, curtailing rights to freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and personal liberty, enshrined in the Tanzanian constitution and key international treaties to which Tanzania is a state party. We respectfully request urgent intervention from your honourable mandates, including an urgent appeal to the government of Tanzania and statement, to address these violations and to safeguard the rights and freedoms of Tanzanian civil society, human rights defenders, journalists, and political actors.

Background and context

Tanzania has a troubling history of suppressing political dissent and curtailing civil liberties, with excessive government control over civil society, media, and political expression, particularly under the previous administration of President Magufuli. Following President Samia's inauguration, there was hope for political reform and an opening of democratic space. Her administration emphasised reconciliation, reform, resilience, and rebuilding (the 4R philosophy). However, [despite initial positive signals](#), including the uplifting of the longstanding ban on political rallies, no real reforms were undertaken, and recent actions

¹ See appendix for a more detailed introduction to submitting organisations

² Due to the extent and nature of the crackdown, this is a general letter of allegation. It has not been possible to obtain the individual consent of all the victims mentioned in this communication. Reports of violations are based on publicly available reports and concerns raised by Tanzanian partners.

indicate a deep structural hostility towards legitimate government criticism in the Tanzanian state apparatus, and a rapid return to strict authoritarianism.

Since 2022, the indigenous Maasai community from Loliondo and Ngorongoro have opposed mass forced evictions being conducted to make way for a game reserve in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. As a result they have faced reprisals, including threats, intimidation, ill-treatment, excessive use of force, [arbitrary arrests, detentions, and forced evictions](#), from government rangers and security forces, creating a climate of fear. The situation has escalated, since the Ngorongoro division was delisted from the voters' register, denying the Maasai living there their right to vote, leading to mass protests, and arrests, in August 2024. Since 2023, the government has also been cracking down on lawyers and defenders - with more than [22 people having been arrested](#) or threatened - for expressing opposition to an agreement between the Tanzanian government and a United Arab Emirates based company, granting a foreign entity authority to manage Tanzania's ports.

In 2024, under the guise of maintaining public order in the lead-up to elections, the government is ramping up its clampdown on political and other dissent. Beyond the law enforcement crackdown highlighted below, the broader crackdown has manifested through legal and administrative restrictions that have severely limited the operations of CSOs, media actors and opposition parties. The government has made use of the Non-Governmental Organisations Act to [arbitrarily deregister](#) and restrict the activities of CSOs. It has also used restrictive provisions - including of the Cybercrimes Act, the Media Services Act, the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, the Electronic and Postal Communication (Sim-Card Registration) Regulations of 2020, and the Statistics Act - to undermine media freedom. Notably, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) has issued legal notices ordering media organisations, including [Watetezi TV](#) a human rights media reporting platform, to remove stories critical of the Maasai evictions or face legal action. As highlighted below, internet service providers in Tanzania have also been reported to be [restricting access to X](#) (formerly known as Twitter) to quell rising tensions. The state has also made frequent use of the judiciary to silence political opposition.

August 2024 crackdown

On 11 August 2024, a large-scale crackdown was initiated against CHADEMA members and supporters across the country, as they mobilised events to commemorate International Youth Day on 12 August. Government authorities had banned the holding of opposition gatherings arguing that the opposition intended to carry out mass anti-government protests similar to what had occurred in neighbouring Kenya. Coordinated arrests and detentions were carried out against CHADEMA members and leaders across multiple regions in Tanzania, including Mbeya, Iringa, and Dar es Salaam. Tanzanian security forces arrested approximately 500 people, including senior leaders of the opposition CHADEMA party, its Chairman Freeman Mbowe, Vice-Chairperson Tundu Lissu, Party Secretary John Mnyika, Nyasa Zone Chairperson Joseph Mbilinyi and Youth Wing Vice Chairperson Moza Ally. Those arrested were reportedly

denied their due process rights, including: access to lawyers, being informed of the reasons for their arrest, and being promptly presented before a court of law. There were also reports of systematic acts of brutality, deprivation of liberty, and confiscation of personal property by the police.

On 18 August 2024, youth activists of CHADEMA, [Deusdedit Soka, Jacob Godwin Mlay and Frank Mbise](#), were reportedly abducted by security forces, and their whereabouts remain unknown. They had been organising a protest for 26 August 2024 against the government's alleged failure to respond to recent disappearances (including of Dioniz Kipanya, CHADEMA's Rukwa leader, who allegedly went missing in July 2024 and whose whereabouts remain unknown). On 21 August 2024, another [108 people were reportedly arrested, and a young man shot dead, in Lamadi](#), in the Simiyu Region, during protests that were also aimed at raising awareness about the lack of accountability by the police for reported abductions of young people in the region. On 30 August 2024, internet service providers were also reported to have [restricted access to X](#) (formerly known as Twitter) due to alleged escalating political tensions arising from these arrests and abductions.

The recent crackdown is not isolated, but part of a [broader pattern](#) of repression. [Political rallies and gatherings are reportedly being regularly disrupted](#) by police, who deploy excessive force, resulting in injuries and destruction of property, arbitrary arrests, and arbitrary detention of political leaders and supporters. These measures have been particularly severe in regions like Mbeya and Iringa, where opposition parties such as CHADEMA have strongholds.

Human Rights Violations

The Tanzanian authorities' actions amount to clear violations of its domestic and international human rights law obligations. Tanzania is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter), and other international human rights instruments that enshrine the rights to freedom of association, expression, and peaceful assembly, and freedom from arbitrary arrests and torture. The rights to freedom of association, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, freedom from arbitrary detention, personal liberty, and human dignity are also protected in the Tanzanian constitution.

Suppression of Political Opposition

The Tanzanian authorities' actions in recent months amount to a marked increase in the restriction of opposition political activities, particularly those of CHADEMA. The systematic targeting of CHADEMA's gatherings, while ruling party celebrations and political gatherings are conducted without incident, underscores the selective and politically motivated nature of these actions, undermining opposition political party actors' and supporters' rights to political participation, and equality and non-discrimination.

The police have deployed excessive force to break up peaceful political gatherings, and numerous leaders and supporters have been arrested and detained under arbitrary charges. For instance, during the political gatherings in Mbeya and other cities for International Youth Day mentioned above, [police arrested and detained hundreds of CHADEMA supporters and leaders](#), including prominent human rights lawyers, Alphonse Lusako and Deogratias Mahinyila, who had been present to provide legal support to those arrested. The arrests of opposition leaders, such as Freeman Mbowe and Tundu Lissu, is the latest of a number of repeated arrests, detentions, harassment, and intimidation against them. Those detained have [reported severe beatings and mistreatment](#) while in custody, amounting to torture and degrading treatment in violation of Tanzania's obligations under the ICCPR, the African Charter and other international instruments. Some detainees have suffered significant injuries, and others have had their property destroyed or confiscated by the police.

[Suppression of Freedom of Expression, Association and Peaceful Assembly](#)

The Tanzanian government's ongoing repression of peaceful protests and political gatherings severely undermines the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, which are protected under the Tanzanian Constitution, ICCPR and the African Charter. In particular, the Tanzanian government's decision to ban CHADEMA's Youth Day celebrations, while simultaneously allowing the ruling party CCM to hold a similar event, underscores the discriminatory and politically motivated nature of these actions.

The state narrative of criminalising legitimate political activity as "destabilisation of the state" further demonstrates the government's intent to stifle democratic participation by equating opposition activism with criminal conduct. The state has also targeted media houses that report on issues that are critical of the government, or that conduct even basic reportage about the dissatisfaction of some communities, including indigenous communities facing evictions. As mentioned above, it has also used restrictive legal provisions - such as the Cybercrimes Act, the Media Services Act, the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, the Electronic and Postal Communication (Sim-Card Registration) Regulations of 2020, and the Statistics Act - to restrict freedom of expression on digital and other media platforms, and to criminalise journalists (including citizen journalists), reporters, media houses and social media users that publish any content critical of the government. On 30 August 2024, the social media site "X", formerly known as [Twitter, was restricted in Tanzania](#), after growing discontent being expressed online over the intensifying crackdown. These actions create a chilling effect on political discourse and civil engagement in Tanzania, perpetuating a culture of fear and repression.

[Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions](#)

The mass arrests of opposition leaders and their supporters constitute an egregious violation of international law, specifically the ICCPR and African Charter. Article 9 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to liberty and security of the person, prohibiting arbitrary arrest or

detention. The Tanzanian authorities' decision to arbitrarily arrest and detain more than 500 individuals, including five journalists, many without charge, without informing them of the reasons of their arrest, denying them access to legal representation or contact with family members, blatantly violates these protections. Most of those detained are reported to have been held beyond the 24-hour legal limit, held in detention arbitrarily for two to three days and then released, without being presented before a court of law. Lawyers who were attending to their arrested clients were also harassed. The arrests of [108 persons in Lamadi](#) in the Simiyu Region, during peaceful protests on 21 August 2024 against the reported abductions of young people in the region, were also arbitrary and unlawful. Other government critics, such as those opposing the intergovernmental [port deal with a UAE company](#), and the [Ngorongoro relocation of the Maasai community](#), have also faced arbitrary arrests and judicial harassment.

Police Brutality and Torture

Numerous credible reports from the ground indicate that detainees have been subjected to physical violence, including beatings while in custody. For instance, it is [alleged](#) that during the recent 11 August crackdown, the Commissioner of Operations and Training, Awadhi Haji, personally assaulted CHADEMA's Secretary General John Mnyika, and outspoken Nyansa region CHADEMA chairperson, former MP, human rights activist and musician Joseph Mbilinyi (commonly known as Sugu), leaving them with severe injuries. Mnyika and Sugu were also allegedly beaten with fists, a club, and trampled upon by other officers while being transported from Mbeya to Dar es Salaam. This brutal treatment was not isolated, with many other detainees reporting similar abuses. As mentioned above, lawyers Alphonse Lusako and Deogratias Mahinyila, who had been providing legal support to detained opposition members, also reported being detained, beaten, and held without access to legal representation. Such actions not only violate the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment guaranteed in international human rights norms, including the ICCPR and African Charter, but also undermine the independence of the legal profession and the right to access justice.

Destruction and Confiscation of Property

During the police operations, there were numerous reports of personal property belonging to opposition supporters and leaders being either destroyed or unlawfully confiscated, in violation of their constitutional right to protection of property. Property confiscated during arrests and detention are often not returned to their owners by the law enforcement agencies.

Enforced Disappearances

Most disturbing in recent months, has been the rise in reports of [enforced disappearances](#) targeting young people, community leaders, political activists and human rights defenders across Tanzania. While there are no official statistics, the Tanganyika Law Society recently published a [list of 83 persons](#) reported to have been abducted since 2016, some of whom have

disappeared, and a significant number found dead. [Opposition leaders](#) and [civil society organisations](#) allege that there have been more than 200 disappearances since 2019. The Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition ([THRDC](#)) [has also raised concerns](#) about the rising incidents of abductions across the country.

Recent disappearances have been primarily reported in regions with heightened political tensions, including areas where youth activism and opposition to the ruling government are strong. [Edgar Mwakabela \(alias Sativa\)](#), an outspoken advocate for traders' rights, was reportedly abducted by suspected security agents in Dar es Salaam on 23 June 2024. While held in incommunicado detention - reportedly first at a workshop at Osterbay Police station, then at a police station in Arusha, before he was transported to Katavi - he was reportedly severely [tortured](#). He was finally reportedly shot through the left side of the head and left for dead in a swamp within Katavi National Park, surrounded by wild animals, but miraculously survived. CHADEMA youth activists, [Deusedith Soka, Jacob Godwin Mlay and Frank Mbise](#), were also reportedly abducted by security forces on 18 August 2024, and their whereabouts are still unknown. They had been mobilising young people for the protest on 26 August 2024 against abductions. [Kombo Twaha Mwana](#), a CHADEMA supporter and youth leader, was also reportedly abducted on 15 June 2024, and held for a month in incommunicado detention in a police station in Tanga. His family filed a police report, but the police denied any knowledge of his whereabouts and said his disappearance was under investigation. A month after his unlawful detention, on 14 July 2024, the police issued a statement confirming he was being held in police detention. When he was finally arraigned before a magistrate court for a bailable cybercrime offence (he is accused of misuse of social media), bail was arbitrarily declined. Concerns have also been raised regarding a young artist, Shadrack Chaula, who was [convicted for drawing and burning a picture of the President](#) on social media site TikTok. Soon after his release from prison, following an online campaign to secure his freedom, he was [reported to have been abducted, and remains missing](#). The authorities deny any knowledge of his whereabouts.

Witnesses have reported these abductions being carried out by security forces or unidentified individuals believed to be linked to the state. Victims are reported to often be taken in the dead of night, with their families left in the dark, fearing for their loved ones' safety, while facing intimidation and threats if they speak out. The chilling effect of these disappearances is palpable, stifling youth and political activism, and fostering a climate of fear and uncertainty. Enforced disappearances constitute grave violations of international law, particularly under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to which Tanzania is a signatory, though it has not yet ratified.

[Targeting of Youth and Human Rights Defenders](#)

As highlighted above, the Tanzanian authorities are increasingly targeting youth and civil society actors, who represent a significant portion of the political opposition movement, and are proponents of democratic reforms. Youth activists, many belonging to CHADEMA's youth wing, have faced disproportionate harassment and intimidation by police forces. The police

have accused these activists of mobilising efforts to instigate violence similar to recent protests in neighbouring Kenya.

These attacks form part of concerted and escalating efforts to harass and intimidate human rights defenders, lawyers, and activists critical of the government. For instance, in July 2023 [lawyer and activist Boniface Mwabukusi and political activist Mdude Nyagali](#), were abducted and detained for seven days following a press conference they held criticising the UAE port agreement alluded to above. The duo were later framed and charged with a treason case, along with former CHADEMA Secretary General, Ambassador Dr Wilbroad Slaa. As mentioned, more than [20 other human rights defenders and activists](#) were also arrested or threatened in 2023 in relation to criticisms of the controversial port deal. Also mentioned above are the cases of human rights lawyers Alphonse Lusako and Deogratias Mahinyila, who were among those recently arrested and brutalised in the 11 August crackdown. They are known for their work in defending human rights, through public interest litigation and representing victims of state repression. Mr Lusako had been one of the petitioners in a public lawsuit challenging the controversial port management deal. The Advocates Act has also been increasingly used to subject human rights lawyers critical of the government to disciplinary proceedings, presided over by the Attorney General or Deputy Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecution.

Civil society organisations in Tanzania, particularly those working on human rights and governance issues, have also come under significant pressure. Organisations like the Tanganyika Law Society (TLS), the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) and the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) have reported harassment, surveillance, and threats from state authorities. The targeting of youth activists, legal practitioners and human rights defenders not only undermines the rule of law but also threatens the broader human rights movement in Tanzania. The crackdown on CSOs is part of this broader effort to curtail any challenges to the ruling party's political dominance and to suppress accountability efforts that seek to expose corruption, human rights abuses, and governance failures.

Impact on Civil Society and Democratic Governance

The government's actions have severely undermined the role of civil society in Tanzania. Many organisations have either scaled back their operations or ceased activities altogether due to fear of reprisal. This crackdown threatens the essential role that civil society plays in democratic governance, such as promoting transparency, advocating for marginalised groups, and holding the government accountable. The repression of opposition political parties also threatens the integrity of Tanzania's political system. By systematically dismantling the opposition's capacity to organise and participate in the political process, the government is undermining democratic pluralism and reinforcing authoritarianism. This backsliding on democratic principles risks plunging the country into deeper political instability.

Appeal for Urgent Action

In light of the foregoing, we respectfully request that the UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders:

1. Issue an urgent communication/joint appeal to the Government of Tanzania, and issue a joint press statement, expressing concern over the ongoing crackdown on activists, journalists, civil society organisations and opposition political parties, strongly reminding the government of its international human rights obligations under the ICCPR and the African Charter.
 - a. Urge the Government of Tanzania to thoroughly investigate all alleged violations and hold perpetrators to account, including through providing reparations to victims, and providing restitution of property that has been confiscated or destroyed.
 - b. Urge the Government of Tanzania to repeal or amend restrictive laws, including the NGO Act, the Political Parties Act, the Advocates Act, the Cybercrimes Act, the Media Services Act, the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, the Electronic and Postal Communication (Sim-Card Registration) Regulations 2020, and the Statistics Act, in line with international human rights standards, and ensure that civil society actors and political parties can operate freely and without fear of retaliation.
 - c. Call for the immediate and unconditional release of all individuals detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and for the cessation of politically motivated prosecutions.
2. Request a country visit to Tanzania to investigate the reported violations and engage with civil society, political parties, and government representatives to assess the human rights situation on the ground.
3. Support any advocacy initiatives with President Samia Suluhu Hassan during her upcoming visit to the UN General Assembly, to raise these concerns directly with her, and to encourage her administration to take concrete steps towards ending the crackdown on civil society and political opposition.
4. Closely monitor the situation in Tanzania, including through regular reporting to the UN Human Rights Council and other relevant bodies, to ensure that the international community remains informed and engaged.
5. Coordinate with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to strengthen efforts in addressing these human rights violations at the regional level. The African

Commission should be encouraged to take a proactive role in investigating the repression of civil society and political opposition in Tanzania.

The Tanzanian government's escalating crackdown on civil society organisations and opposition political parties threatens democratic governance and human rights in the country and requires urgent international attention to prevent further deterioration of political and civic space. We respectfully call on your honourable mandates to act swiftly and decisively to address these violations.

Yours faithfully,



Washington Katema
Executive Director
Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network



Namakajo Deric Fredric
Director Legal, and Advocacy
Umoja Empowerment Resources



Mary Pais Da Silva
Co-Executive Director
Strategic Initiative and Community Engagement
African Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders

Arnold Tsunga
Convenor
Civic Space Network

Tito Magoti
Chief Legal Counsel

Submitting organisations

Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SouthernDefenders):

SouthernDefenders embodies an ironclad commitment to protecting human rights defenders (HRDs) in the face of attacks and shrinking civic space, both offline and online. It coordinates regional efforts to provide rapid, practical, comprehensive, and inclusive protection support to HRDs at high risk, defend civic space, and empower HRDs to mitigate the effects of repression. To this end, the SouthernDefenders contribute to the respect and recognition of HRDs as legitimate actors and agents of social change with universally recognized and constitutionally guaranteed rights.

Umoja Empowerment Resources (UER)

UER is registered in Uganda and was founded by a cross-generational group that realised the need for intentional empowerment of individuals and organisations to spur development and sustainability of the African people. UER aims to put collaboration, partnerships, research and learning at the centre of empowerment of individuals, private and public sector organisations, to ensure maximum productivity and sustainability in all spheres of life in Africa.

African Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders

The African Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD Initiative) is a formidable Pan-African, women-defender-led protection and care meshwork dedicated to safeguarding women human rights defenders in Africa and beyond.

Civic Space Network

CSN is dedicated to promoting and protecting civic space, digital or physical, online or offline that people need to organise, mobilise, intervene and transform.

ICJ Kenya Section

ICJ Kenya seeks to consolidate its vision of being a premier human rights organisation promoting a just, free and equitable society. To this end, we strive to enhance our governance and membership, improve our institutional efficiency through ICT, Communications, and Learning, apply strong organisational values and internal controls systems, and ensure our financial sustainability.

Pan Africa Human Rights Defenders Network

AfricanDefenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network) is a network of five African sub-regional organisations, dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) across the African continent.

National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Kenya

Defenders Coalition, the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Kenya is a national organization incorporated in the Republic of Kenya as a Trust.

Its mission is to strengthen the capacity of human rights defenders (HRDs) to work effectively in the country and to reduce their vulnerability to the risk of persecution, including by advocating for a favourable legal and policy environment in Kenya.

LDC is a public interest law firm based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. We advocate for respect for human rights through litigation and human rights campaigning.