



# Report on the Situation

Of Human Rights Defenders and  
Civic Space In Tanzania, 2025



**REPORT  
ON THE  
SITUATION  
OF HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS  
AND CIVIC  
SPACE IN  
TANZANIA,**



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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACHPR</b>	– African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights
<b>ACT</b>	– Alliance for Change and Transparency
<b>AG</b>	– Attorney General
<b>AU</b>	– African Union
<b>BASATA</b>	– National Arts Council of Tanzania
<b>CCM</b>	– Chama Cha Mapinduzi
<b>CHADEMA</b>	– Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo
<b>CHRAGG</b>	– Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance
<b>CSL</b>	– Centre for Strategic Litigation
<b>CSO</b>	– Civil Society Organization
<b>DDI</b>	– Disability Human Rights Defenders Initiative
<b>DPP</b>	– Director of Public Prosecutions
<b>EAC</b>	– East African Community
<b>EACJ</b>	– East African Court of Justice
<b>EPOCA</b>	– Electronic and Postal Communications Act
<b>HRD</b>	– Human Rights Defender
<b>IGP</b>	– Inspector General of Police
<b>INEC</b>	– Independent National Electoral Commission
<b>LHRC</b>	– Legal and Human Rights Centre
<b>NaCoNGO</b>	– National Council of Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>NET-FEHRD</b>	– Network of Environmental Human Rights Defenders
<b>NGO</b>	– Non-Governmental Organization
<b>PALU</b>	– Pan African Lawyers Union
<b>PCCB</b>	– Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau
<b>TEC</b>	– Tanzania Episcopal Conference
<b>TCRA</b>	– Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority
<b>THRDC</b>	– Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition
<b>TLS</b>	– Tanganyika Law Society
<b>TRA</b>	– Tanzania Revenue Authority
<b>UDART</b>	– Dar Rapid Transit Agency
<b>UN</b>	– United Nations
<b>UPR</b>	– Universal Periodic Review
<b>USAID</b>	– United States Agency for International Development
<b>VPN</b>	– Virtual Private Network
<b>ZAECA</b>	– Zanzibar Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Authority
<b>ZBC</b>	– Zanzibar Broadcasting Commission
<b>ZCU</b>	– Zonal Coordinating Unit



# EXECUTICE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This report examines the situation of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and civic space in Tanzania during the year 2025, with particular focus on the political and human rights environment surrounding the 2025 General Elections and their implications. The report analyzes the legal, political, and institutional environment affecting civic space, documents human rights violations committed against human rights defenders, political actors, journalists, and civil society organizations, and evaluates the broader implications for democratic governance, rule of law, and human rights protection in Tanzania.

During 2025, the civic space and human rights defenders environment in Tanzania continued to face significant challenges, particularly during the 2025 General Elections period. THRDC documented widespread violations affecting Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), journalists, activists, political actors, and civil society organizations, including arbitrary arrests, abductions, intimidation, digital repression, and attacks on media freedom. In 2025 alone, THRDC documented 42 incidents of abductions and attacks involving HRDs, activists, political actors, and journalists, as well as 20 incidents of threats and intimidation affecting identified journalists and media presenters. During the same period, three journalists were reportedly killed in the context of election-related violence, and 11 online television platforms in Zanzibar were suspended. On 5 May 2025, the Government announced that the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) had closed 80,171 blogs, websites, and online platforms as of 31 March 2025 for allegedly publishing content contrary to national laws and regulations, raising further concerns regarding freedom of expression and digital civic space in Tanzania.

The election period was also characterized by mass arrests, prosecutions, and increased demand for emergency protection and legal assistance. More than 2,045 individuals were arrested in connection with election-related protests and unrest across the country. Monitoring visits conducted by THRDC at Oysterbay Police Station in Dar es Salaam found that more than 400 detainees were being held at the station at one point, indicating severe overcrowding in police custody, while over 240 individuals were charged with treason at the Resident Magistrates Court of Dar es Salaam at Kisutu from 7 November 2025 in connection with post-election protests and unrest.


In response to the deteriorating civic space environment, THRDC strengthened its protection interventions and provided direct support to 1,509 HRDs through legal representation, emergency relocation, medical and psychosocial support, family assistance, and strategic litigation. Among those assisted, 1,343 HRDs received legal representation, 125 received relocation support, and 1,256 individuals were released through court decisions, withdrawal of charges, or failure of prosecution to proceed with cases. THRDC also coordinated one of the largest legal support responses during the election period in collaboration with the Tanganyika Law Society and the Legal and Human Rights Centre to support individuals arrested during election-related operations and protests.

## THRDC Interventions and Response Measures



## Legal and Policy Framework for Human Rights Defenders

The report finds that Tanzania does not have a specific legal framework recognizing and protecting Human Rights Defenders as a distinct category. While the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, association, assembly, and participation in public affairs, there is no specific legislation addressing the protection needs of HRDs. As a result, HRDs operate within a general legal framework that does not adequately address risks such as threats, arbitrary arrests, surveillance, harassment, and reprisals.



Several national laws continue to affect civic space and the work of HRDs, including media laws, cybercrime laws, political party regulations, and online content regulations. Some provisions within these laws have been associated with restrictions on freedom of expression, access to information, and civic engagement.

At the regional and international level, Tanzania is bound by several human rights instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These instruments guarantee fundamental rights relevant to civic space and human rights work. However, the report notes gaps between legal obligations and actual practice.

### **The 2025 General Elections and Civic Space**

The 2025 General Elections took place in a politically tense environment characterized by longstanding demands for constitutional and electoral reforms. Key reform issues included the independence of the electoral commission, judicial oversight of elections, independent candidates, and broader constitutional reforms. Many of these reforms remained unresolved before the elections, contributing to mistrust and political tensions.

The legal framework governing elections, political parties, and election observation gave significant powers to regulatory authorities while limiting judicial oversight in certain electoral matters. Regional courts, including the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the East African Court of Justice, had previously ruled against some aspects of Tanzania's electoral and political party laws, but implementation of those decisions remained limited.

The report concludes that the legal and institutional framework contributed to the constriction of civic and political space during the election period.

One of the most significant events affecting civic space in 2025 was the arrest and prosecution of opposition leader Tundu Antiphas Lissu on treason charges. The report documents numerous concerns relating to his arrest, detention, and trial, including arrest without warrant, lack of prompt information on charges, restrictions on access to lawyers, interference with legal documents, prolonged pre-trial detention, virtual court proceedings, and restrictions on public access to court proceedings.

The report also documents restrictions on journalists, lawyers, observers, and members of the public attempting to attend court proceedings. Arrests of supporters, allegations of torture, incommunicado detention, and abandonment of detainees in remote areas were also reported during court proceedings.



These developments raised serious concerns regarding fair trial rights, open justice, judicial independence, and the broader political environment during the election period.

### **Restrictions on Journalists, Lawyers, and Trial Observers**

The report documents multiple incidents where journalists were harassed, arrested, or denied access while covering court proceedings and political events. Lawyers were also arrested at court premises while representing clients, raising concerns regarding interference with legal representation and the independence of the legal profession.

Regional and international trial observers and lawyers who travelled to Tanzania to observe court proceedings were detained, denied entry, or deported. Some regional human rights defenders were arrested and later alleged torture and ill-treatment. These incidents attracted significant regional and international attention and raised concerns regarding freedom of movement, judicial transparency, and protection of human rights defenders.

### **Overall Situation of Civic Space in 2025**

The report concludes that the 2025 electoral period was characterized by a shrinking civic space environment marked by arrests of political actors, restrictions on public gatherings, harassment of journalists, restrictions on court access, arrests and torture of supporters, and legal and administrative restrictions affecting civil society and political participation.

The combination of restrictive laws, administrative powers, arrests, and security operations created an environment in which civic actors, political opposition, journalists, and human rights defenders operated under significant pressure and risk.

The report concludes that the situation of human rights defenders and civic space in Tanzania during 2025 was significantly influenced by the electoral environment, legal framework, and political tensions surrounding the elections. While Tanzania maintains a formal legal framework for human rights protection, gaps remain in the recognition and protection of human rights defenders, judicial oversight in electoral matters, and protection of civic space.

The report emphasizes the need for legal and policy reforms, stronger protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, judicial and electoral reforms, and measures to ensure that civic space remains open, safe, and enabling for democratic participation, human rights work, and rule of law.

# CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of a Human Rights Defender (HRD), including the legal and non-legal mechanisms through which HRDs are recognized and protected. It further examines the roles performed by HRDs and the legal and policy frameworks that support their work at national, regional, and international levels.

Human Rights Defenders are widely regarded as the hope of ordinary citizens in the pursuit of justice, accountability, and the protection of human dignity. They operate at the frontline of human rights protection, often in challenging and high-risk environments. This chapter lays the foundation for understanding who HRDs are, the scope of their work, the rights that enable their activities, and the protection systems designed to safeguard them. These elements collectively form the basis of a healthy and vibrant civic space where individuals and groups can promote and defend human rights without fear.


### 1.1 Defining the Human Rights Defender

### Defining the Human Rights Defender: It's About Action, Not Titles

To clarify the inclusive and action-oriented definition of a Human Rights Defender (HRD) while highlighting the specific rights they protect and the essential requirement of **non-violence**.

#### Who Qualifies as an HRD?

**Defined by Action, Not Title**



Journalist reporting on conflicts | Community Members organizing for legal rights | Lawyer defending rights in court

An individual is identified as a Human Rights Defender by the nature of their activities aimed at promoting and protecting human rights, rather than a formal professional affiliation.


**A Diverse Coalition of Actors**  
HRDs include a wide range of people, such as lawyers, journalists, activists, volunteers, and everyday community members.

**Professional & Non-Professional**  
Both those working in official human rights capacities and those acting as volunteers or concerned citizens are recognized under this definition.

#### The Spectrum of Protected Rights


**Broad Spectrum of Advocacy**  
Human Rights Defenders work to advance all categories of rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

**Protecting Basic Necessities**



Advocacy efforts often focus on essential needs like the right to life, food, water, health, housing, and education.

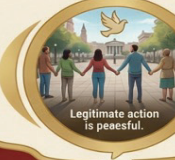
**Defending Fundamental Freedoms**



Their work includes the protection of core democratic freedoms such as expression, movement, and association.


#### The Boundary of Legitimacy

**Grounded in Peaceful Action**  
The legitimacy of a Human Rights Defender is fundamentally rooted in lawful engagement and peaceful human rights work.



Legitimate action is peaceful.

**Exclusion of Violence**



**STRICTLY EXCLUDED:** Individuals or groups who engage in, promote, or incite violence.

1



An individual is identified as a Human Rights Defender not by formal title, professional affiliation, or official mandate, but by the nature of their actions. Any person engaged in activities aimed at promoting and protecting human rights qualifies as a Human Rights Defender. This includes both professional and non-professional actors, such as lawyers, journalists, activists, volunteers, and community members.

Human Rights Defenders work to advance a broad spectrum of rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. These range from the right to life, food, water, health, housing, and education, to freedoms such as expression, movement, and association.

The definition of HRDs excludes individuals or groups who engage in or promote violence. The legitimacy of HRDs is therefore grounded in peaceful action and lawful engagement in human rights work. While the definition is intentionally inclusive, challenges arise in situations where individuals, such as politicians or public officials, also engage in human rights advocacy. Nonetheless, the defining criterion remains the promotion and protection of human rights, regardless of professional or political affiliation. Due to the nature of their work, HRDs often operate in high-risk environments and are frequently subjected to threats, harassment, arbitrary arrest, abduction, and other forms of reprisals aimed at silencing their voices.

## **1.2 Categories of Human Rights Defenders**

Human Rights Defenders operate within a diverse ecosystem comprising individuals and groups with varying expertise, levels of engagement, and thematic focus. Understanding these categories is essential for designing appropriate protection mechanisms.

- a) By profession, HRDs include journalists, lawyers, environmentalists, whistleblowers, trade unionists, teachers, medical practitioners, police officers, and other actors engaged in human rights work.
- b) By level of operation, HRDs may function at national, regional, or international levels, depending on the scope of their work.
- c) By thematic focus, HRDs may include women's rights defenders, children's rights defenders, environmental and land rights defenders, grassroots and community-based defenders, digital rights activists, civil and political rights defenders, and defenders of minority rights.



### **1.3 Roles and Accountability of Human Rights Defenders**

Human Rights Defenders perform a range of critical functions that contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights. These include:


- a) Documenting and reporting human rights violations to establish evidence for advocacy and accountability;
- b) Providing support to victims, including legal, medical, and psychosocial assistance;
- c) Combating impunity by challenging systems and practices that enable violations;
- d) Promoting human rights awareness and education within communities;
- e) Seeking and disseminating information to ensure public access to knowledge on rights and obligations;
- f) Providing legal representation and assistance to victims of human rights abuses;
- g) Advocating for policy and legal reforms at national, regional, and international levels.

Through these roles, HRDs contribute to strengthening democratic governance, promoting accountability, and fostering a culture of respect for human rights.

### **1.4 Rights of Human Rights Defenders under International Law**

The work of Human Rights Defenders is grounded in international law, particularly the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1998. This Declaration recognizes and guarantees key rights necessary for HRDs to operate effectively, including:

- a) The right to freedom of association;
- b) The right to peaceful assembly;
- c) The right to seek, receive, and disseminate information;
- d) The right to develop and discuss human rights ideas and advocate for their acceptance;
- e) The right to criticize government institutions and policies;
- f) The right to access and communicate with national and international organizations;
- g) The right to legal protection and effective remedies;
- h) The right to provide legal assistance to victims;
- i) The right to access resources, including funding for human rights work.



These rights form the foundation of a functioning civic space and enable HRDs to carry out their work in promoting transparency, accountability, and justice.

## **1.5 Protection Mechanisms and State Obligations**

The protection of Human Rights Defenders is based on a multi-layered framework that combines legal obligations of states with institutional and non-governmental support systems.

### **1.5.1 Legal Protection Mechanisms at the International Level**

The primary international instrument for the protection of HRDs is the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998), which formally recognizes the legitimacy of their work and outlines state obligations. This framework is reinforced by other international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Under these frameworks, states have the primary responsibility to protect HRDs from violence, threats, retaliation, and intimidation arising from their work. This obligation extends to protection against violations committed by both state and non-state actors.

International mechanisms supporting HRDs include the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, who monitors violations, receives complaints, engages with governments, and conducts country visits. In addition, international and regional organizations and civil society actors provide practical support through legal support, emergency funding, relocation, advocacy, and capacity building.

#### **a) Models of International Best Practice**

Several countries, including Norway, Switzerland, Ireland, and the Netherlands, have demonstrated strong commitment to the protection of HRDs through the adoption of national guidelines, funding mechanisms, and diplomatic engagement strategies that prioritize the safety and protection of human rights defenders.

### **1.5.2 Legal Protection Mechanisms at the Regional Level**

At the regional level, the protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) is primarily anchored within the African human rights system, particularly through the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). The Commission plays a central role in promoting and protecting human rights across the continent and has established specific mechanisms to address the situation of HRDs, including the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa. This mandate is responsible for monitoring violations, engaging with States, and promoting effective protection measures for HRDs.



Over time, the African human rights system has developed a series of normative instruments that recognize and reinforce the role of HRDs. These include the Grand Bay Declaration and Plan of Action (1999) and the Kigali Declaration (2003), both of which emphasize the importance of civil society and call upon States to create enabling environments for human rights work.

More recently, the African Commission adopted the Declaration on the Promotion of the Role of Human Rights Defenders and their Protection in Africa (2024), which represents a significant advancement in regional protection standards. This Declaration builds upon the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders while contextualizing protection within African realities. It provides a comprehensive framework that defines HRDs, outlines their rights, and clarifies State obligations, including the duty to ensure that national laws do not impose arbitrary restrictions on defenders' work.<sup>1</sup>


The Declaration also introduces important developments, including recognition of emerging threats such as digital surveillance, cyber restrictions, and reprisals against defenders, and calls on States to adopt national laws and policies aligned with international standards. It further emphasizes the need for an enabling environment that supports the participation of HRDs in governance processes and requires States to report on measures taken to implement these protections.

In addition to formal African Union instruments, several regional and sub-regional declarations and initiatives have contributed to strengthening HRD protection. For instance, the Bishoftu Declaration on Human Rights Defenders calls for immediate measures to enhance the security of defenders, including independent investigations into attacks, repeal of restrictive laws, and adoption of protective legislation at national level.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, broader normative frameworks such as the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms provide guidance on the protection of digital rights, emphasizing that States must respect, protect, and fulfill rights in online spaces, which are increasingly central to the work of HRDs.

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1 The Declaration on the Promotion of the Role of Human Rights Defenders and their Protection in Africa, Jan 2024 available at [https://achpr.au.int/en/documents/2024-01-25/declaration-promotion-role-human-rights-defenders-and-their-pro?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://achpr.au.int/en/documents/2024-01-25/declaration-promotion-role-human-rights-defenders-and-their-pro?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

2 Bishoftu Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, 2023 available at [https://www.focus-obs.org/documents/africa-bishoftu-declaration-on-human-rights-defenders/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.focus-obs.org/documents/africa-bishoftu-declaration-on-human-rights-defenders/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)



These regional mechanisms collectively provide important platforms for advocacy, monitoring, and engagement with Member States. They also reinforce the obligation of States to ensure that HRDs operate in a safe and enabling environment, free from intimidation, harassment, and undue restrictions. Despite the existence of these frameworks, implementation remains uneven across the continent, and many HRDs continue to face significant risks. This underscores the need for stronger domestication of regional standards and more effective enforcement of protection mechanisms at the national level.

### **1.5.3 Legal Protection Mechanisms at the National Level**

At the national level, the protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Tanzania is grounded in the broader constitutional and legal framework governing human rights. However, this framework does not explicitly recognize or provide specific protection for HRDs as a distinct category, thereby creating significant protection gaps.

The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977, provides the foundation for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. Under the Bill of Rights (Articles 12–24), it guarantees key rights relevant to the work of HRDs, including equality before the law, the right to life, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly, and participation in public affairs. Similarly, the Constitution of Zanzibar, 1984, contains provisions safeguarding fundamental rights within its jurisdiction.

Despite these guarantees, neither Constitution expressly recognizes Human Rights Defenders nor addresses the specific risks associated with their work. As a result, HRDs remain legally unrecognized as a special category requiring targeted protection. In addition to constitutional provisions, several national laws regulate the operational environment for HRDs and civic space. These include: the Media Services Act, 2016, the Access to Information Act, 2016, the Cybercrimes Act, 2015, the Statistics Act, 2015 (as amended), the Electronic and Postal Communications Act and the Online Content Regulations, 2020 (as amended), the Non-Governmental Organizations Act, 2002 and its Regulations, the Political Parties Act (as amended), the Police Force and Auxiliary Services Act. While these laws provide a regulatory framework, several of their provisions have been associated with restrictions on freedom of expression, access to information, digital rights, and civic engagement, thereby affecting the work of HRDs.

At the institutional level, the Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG) serves as the National Human Rights Institution mandated to promote and protect human rights and good governance under Article 129 and 130 of the Constitution of United Republic of Tanzania, 1977. Although its mandate is broad, it does not specifically focus on the protection of HRDs as a distinct group.



In response to these gaps, efforts have been made to promote the development of a dedicated national protection framework. The Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) has developed a Model Policy on Human Rights Defenders, which aims to guide the establishment of a comprehensive legal and policy framework for the recognition and protection of HRDs in Tanzania.

Notably, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025, the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), in collaboration with the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs (MoCLA) and the Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance, convened a high-level consultative meeting in Dodoma to deliberate on the development of a national policy framework for the protection of HRDs. The meeting brought together key stakeholders, including government officials and international experts, notably Mr. Clément Nyaletsossi Voulé, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.



*THRDC secretariat together with officials from the Ministry of Constitution and Legal Affairs and ISHR representative, Mr. Clément Nyaletsossi Voulé, during a high level engagement meeting in Dodoma.*

The engagement focused on reviewing the legal and policy environment for HRDs, identifying protection gaps, and aligning national frameworks with international and regional human rights standards. The Ministry formally received the proposed Model Policy and committed to further engagement and integration of HRD protection within national strategies and policy processes.<sup>3</sup> This consultative process reflects growing recognition of the need to institutionalize protection mechanisms for HRDs in Tanzania, although concrete legislative outcomes remain pending.

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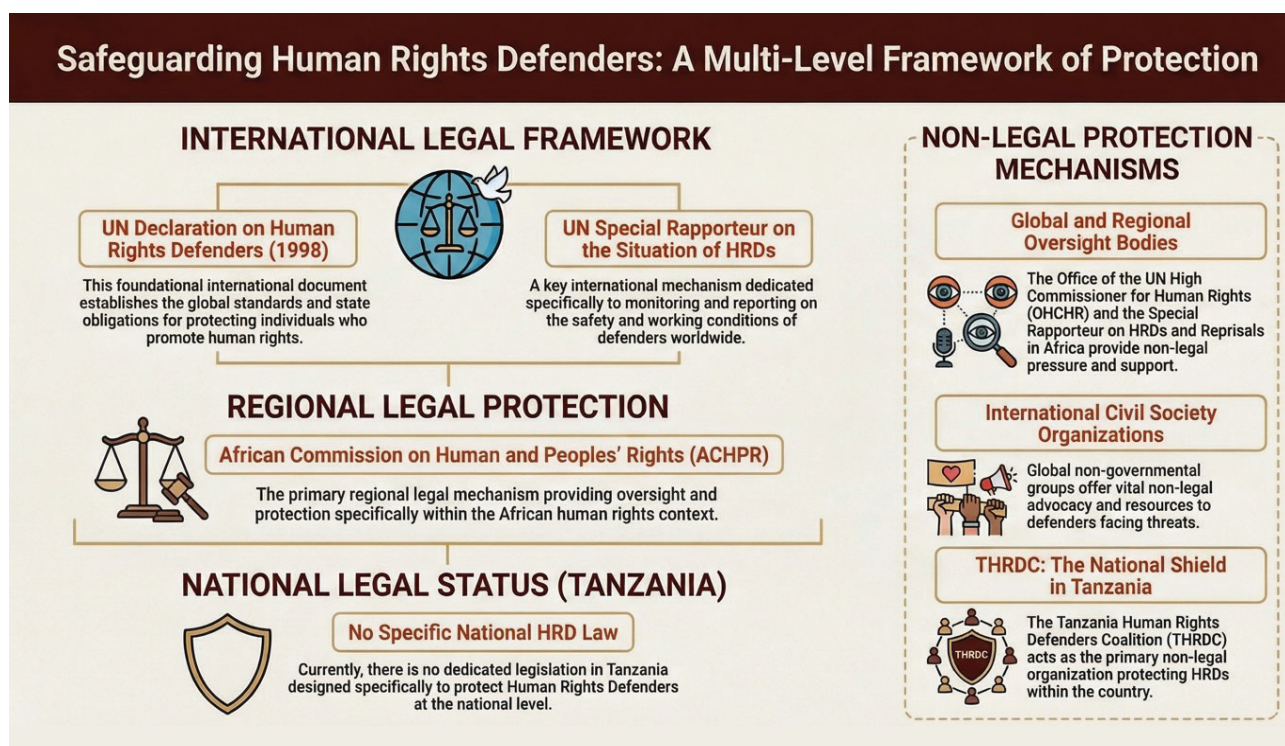
<sup>3</sup> THRDC–MoCLA Consultative Meeting on HRDs Policy Development, Dodoma, 22 April 2025, more information available at [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/olengurumwa\\_on-april-22-2025-the-tanzania-human-rights-activity-7320679164972261376-wrY9?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/olengurumwa_on-april-22-2025-the-tanzania-human-rights-activity-7320679164972261376-wrY9?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Comparatively, several African countries have made notable progress in adopting specific legislation for the protection of HRDs. Côte d'Ivoire adopted a law on the promotion and protection of HRDs in 2014, followed by Burkina Faso in 2017 and Mali in 2018. The Democratic Republic of Congo has also enacted legislation providing a legal framework for the recognition and protection of HRDs. These examples demonstrate the feasibility and importance of adopting dedicated legal frameworks at the national level.

In Tanzania, however, the absence of a specific legal framework continues to expose HRDs to risks, including harassment, intimidation, and legal uncertainty. The reliance on general human rights provisions, without tailored protection mechanisms, limits the effectiveness of protection efforts and underscores the urgent need for legislative and policy reforms.

### 1.6 Non-Legal Protection Mechanisms

In addition to legal frameworks, non-legal protection mechanisms play a critical role in ensuring the safety of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). These mechanisms include strategies, programs, and interventions developed by international, regional, and national actors to prevent violations, respond to threats, and support defenders at risk.





### **a) International Protection Mechanisms**

At the international level, several institutions and organizations provide monitoring, advocacy, emergency support, relocation assistance, trial observation, and capacity building for HRDs. One of the key protection mechanisms is the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur monitors the situation of HRDs worldwide, receives complaints from human rights defenders at risk, communicates urgent appeals to governments, conducts country visits, and presents annual reports to the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. HRDs and organizations can submit urgent cases directly to this mandate when defenders face threats, arrest, harassment, or other violations.

Another important protection mechanism is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which supports HRDs through monitoring human rights situations, supporting UN Special Procedures, trial observation, capacity building, and engagement with governments on human rights protection. OHCHR also works with civil society organizations and national human rights institutions to strengthen protection frameworks for defenders.

Several international civil society organizations also play a major role in protecting HRDs globally. These include Front Line Defenders, Protection International, CIVICUS, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Federation for Human Rights through the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. These organizations provide emergency assistance such as relocation support, legal assistance, digital and physical security support, emergency grants, trial observation, international advocacy, and capacity building for HRDs at risk. These international mechanisms are important because they provide rapid response support, international visibility, diplomatic pressure, and emergency assistance, especially in situations where national protection systems are weak or unavailable.

### **b) Regional Protection Mechanisms**

At the regional level, HRDs in Africa are supported by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, particularly through the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Reprisals in Africa. In addition, regional networks such as the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project and the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network facilitate coordination, advocacy, emergency protection, relocation support, and capacity building for human rights defenders across Africa.

## c) National Protection Mechanisms

At the national level, non-legal protection mechanisms often include civil society protection networks, emergency response programs, legal aid organizations, temporary relocation programs, digital security support, and psychosocial support services for defenders at risk. In Tanzania, the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition play a central role in providing protection services, documenting violations, raising awareness on security and protection, providing emergency support, and advocating for improved protection frameworks for human rights defenders.

### 1.7 The Role of THRDC

In 2025, THRDC continued to play a central role in coordinating protection, advocacy, and support for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Tanzania. As a national network of more than 350 human rights organizations, THRDC operated as a national protection and coordination mechanism providing support to HRDs at national and grassroots levels through preventive protection, emergency response, legal support, advocacy, monitoring, and capacity building interventions. THRDC implemented protection interventions for Human Rights Defenders through a comprehensive protection framework built on four key pillars:



These pillars combine preventive protection, rapid response mechanisms, institutional engagement, legal support, and capacity strengthening in order to ensure both immediate protection and long term safety and resilience of human rights defenders in Tanzania.



#### a) Membership Empowerment and Public Engagement

Membership empowerment and public engagement remained a key preventive protection strategy implemented by THRDC in 2025 to strengthen the safety, resilience, and coordination of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and civil society organizations across Tanzania. Through its national membership network of more than 350 organizations and Zonal Coordinating Units, THRDC conducted membership visits, coordination meetings, monitoring missions, and technical support engagements in different regions including Zanzibar and the Southern Highlands. These activities strengthened collaboration among members, improved information sharing and early warning mechanisms, identified protection needs of grassroots defenders, and expanded the Coalition network through recruitment of new member organizations.

THRDC also implemented capacity building programmes aimed at strengthening the institutional and security capacity of HRDs and civil society organizations operating in restrictive civic space environments. The Coalition conducted trainings on risk assessment, digital and physical security, human rights monitoring and documentation, advocacy, organizational governance, legal compliance, and institutional management. In 2025, more than 1,030 civil society representatives benefited from these trainings, while additional induction and empowerment programmes were conducted for new THRDC members to strengthen their understanding of protection mechanisms, security management, and organizational resilience.

In addition, THRDC strengthened thematic coordination and specialized protection initiatives targeting groups of defenders facing particular risks and vulnerabilities. Through thematic networks and specialized protection desks such as the Disability Human Rights Defenders Initiative (DDI), the Network of Environmental Human Rights Defenders (NET-FEHRD), and the Child Human Rights Defenders Desk, THRDC provided targeted support, coordination, advocacy, and capacity building for defenders working on disability rights, environmental justice, child rights, governance, and other thematic areas. These interventions contributed to strengthening solidarity, coordination, resilience, and preventive protection of HRDs across Tanzania.

#### b) Protection, Engagement, Research and Advocacy

Protection, engagement, research, and advocacy remained central pillars of THRDC's protection work in 2025. Through its national network, zonal coordinating units, and member organizations, THRDC monitored and documented more than 400 incidents of human rights violations affecting Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), journalists, civil society organizations, political actors, and communities across



Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar, including 42 cases of enforced disappearances. The Coalition conducted fact-finding missions, produced situation and policy reports, and issued more than 100 public statements addressing arrests, abductions, civic space restrictions, election-related violations, and other human rights concerns. These interventions strengthened evidence-based advocacy, legal interventions, strategic litigation, and national and international reporting on the situation of HRDs and civic space in Tanzania.

THRDC also conducted strategic advocacy and policy engagements with government institutions, justice sector actors, civil society organizations, regional bodies, and international human rights mechanisms to improve the legal and policy environment for HRDs and civil society organizations. At the national level, THRDC convened dialogues and consultative meetings with institutions including the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs, the Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance, the Judiciary, the Tanganyika Law Society, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Tanzania Revenue Authority to discuss legal reforms, civic space, access to justice, tax reforms, and development of a national protection framework for HRDs. THRDC also convened the National Dialogue on Journalists' Safety and Security ahead of the elections and engaged political stakeholders on governance, democracy, and constitutional reforms.

At the regional and international levels, THRDC strengthened collaboration with regional protection networks, Bar Associations, African human rights mechanisms, United Nations human rights bodies, and international organizations to raise awareness on the situation of HRDs and civic space in Tanzania. THRDC participated in regional and international engagements including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and United Nations human rights processes, where it shared information on enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, civic space restrictions, and children's rights. Through monitoring, advocacy, and strategic engagement, THRDC contributed to strengthening accountability, increasing international visibility of human rights violations, promoting legal and policy reforms, and strengthening protection networks for Human Rights Defenders in Tanzania.

### c) Protection Planning and Risk Management

Protection planning and risk management remained an important preventive protection pillar implemented by THRDC in 2025 to strengthen the safety, preparedness, and resilience of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and civil society organizations operating in high-risk and restrictive environments. Through trainings and capacity building programmes, THRDC strengthened the ability of HRDs to identify risks, assess threats, improve digital and physical security, and document



human rights violations. The Coalition conducted trainings for grassroots HRDs on risk assessment, security management, monitoring and documentation of violations, child rights protection, and resilience strategies, reaching more than 60 grassroots defenders from different zones of Tanzania. These interventions improved security awareness, preparedness, and community-level protection mechanisms for HRDs working in high-risk contexts.

THRDC also strengthened legal protection mechanisms and institutional resilience through capacity building programmes for lawyers, civil society organizations, and Bar Associations. In 2025, the Coalition conducted human rights and legal education trainings involving lawyers from Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar focusing on human rights frameworks, strategic litigation, advocacy, and access to justice. Additional trainings for CSOs and Bar Associations focused on advocacy, policy engagement, monitoring and reporting of violations, organizational governance, statutory compliance, financial management, and institutional sustainability. More than 1,030 civil society representatives benefited from institutional strengthening programmes aimed at reducing operational and legal risks facing organizations working within restrictive civic space environments.

In addition, THRDC strengthened early warning and rapid response mechanisms through its Zonal Coordinating Units (ZCUs) and membership network across Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar. The zonal structures supported monitoring of threats, reporting of incidents affecting HRDs, coordination of rapid response interventions, and communication between grassroots defenders and the national office, particularly during the election period when risks significantly increased. THRDC also conducted online trainings on modern resource mobilization and alternative funding strategies for CSOs to strengthen organizational sustainability and resilience. Through these interventions, THRDC contributed to preventive protection by strengthening preparedness, risk mitigation, institutional resilience, coordination, and rapid response mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders in Tanzania.

#### d) Litigation, Emergency Support and Rescue

Litigation, emergency support, and rescue remained central protection interventions implemented by THRDC in 2025 to support Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) facing arrests, detention, violence, legal harassment, and other security threats. Through its nationally coordinated rapid response protection mechanism, THRDC provided direct protection support to 1,509 HRDs, including legal representation, emergency relocation, medical and psychosocial support, family assistance, and strategic litigation support. Among those assisted, 1,343 HRDs received legal representation, 125 received relocation support, and 1,256 individuals were released through court

decisions, withdrawal of charges, or failure of prosecution to proceed with cases. During the election period, THRDC also coordinated one of the largest legal support responses for individuals arrested in connection with election-related protests and violence, in collaboration with the Tanganyika Law Society and the Legal and Human Rights Centre.



THRDC further strengthened protection of HRDs through legal representation, trial observation, strategic litigation, and collaboration with lawyers and Bar Associations. During the post-election period, the Coalition conducted monitoring visits in police stations and courts, documented overcrowding and detention conditions, and coordinated legal support for activists, journalists, lawyers, opposition supporters, and ordinary citizens facing serious charges including treason and terrorism-related offences. Strategic litigation also remained an important long-term protection strategy. In 2025, THRDC supported nine public interest litigation cases, including the landmark case of *Onesmo Olengurumwa v Attorney General*, where the Court of Appeal declared unconstitutional provisions of the Basic Rights and Duties Enforcement Act that restricted public interest litigation and access to constitutional justice. The decision significantly strengthened constitutional litigation, accountability, and access to justice for HRDs and civil society organizations.



Through emergency support, rescue interventions, legal aid, and strategic litigation, THRDC contributed to immediate and long-term protection of HRDs by preventing prolonged unlawful detention, strengthening access to justice, supporting recovery and resilience of defenders at risk, and challenging restrictive legal frameworks affecting civic space. These interventions also strengthened solidarity, coordination, and trust among HRDs, lawyers, civil society organizations, and protection networks, thereby improving the overall protection environment for human rights defenders in Tanzania.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

Despite the existence of these international, regional, and national protection mechanisms, the protection of HRDs in Tanzania remains a developing area, as some human rights defenders still lack awareness of available protection mechanisms and their rights, and protection resources remain limited compared to the level of risks faced by defenders.

Non-legal protection mechanisms complement legal frameworks by providing practical, rapid, and flexible protection measures, especially in emergency situations where legal remedies may be slow, inaccessible, or ineffective.

# THE 2025 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND ITS IMPLICATION ON HRDs AND CIVIC SPACE

## 2.0 Introduction

The 2025 General Elections in Tanzania constituted one of the most defining and contested political moments in the country's history. The elections tested the resilience of democratic institutions, the credibility of electoral processes, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. The electoral period was characterized by political tensions, killings, enforced disappearances, legal contestations, demands for meaningful electoral reforms, and increasing scrutiny of civic and digital spaces.

The elections also exposed broader governance and human rights challenges, including restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and political participation. Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), journalists, lawyers, civil society actors, and online activists played an important role in promoting accountability, civic participation, and electoral transparency. However, their involvement during the electoral period exposed them to various risks including killings, enforced disappearances, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, harassment, threats, digital attacks, and other forms of reprisals.

This chapter examines the implications of the 2025 General Elections on Human Rights Defenders and civic space in Tanzania by analyzing the political environment surrounding the elections, the restrictions experienced during the electoral process, and the broader impact on democratic participation and fundamental freedoms.

## 2.1 Electoral Environment and Restrictions on Civic Space

The 2025 electoral period unfolded within a politically sensitive environment marked by increasing restrictions on civic and political freedoms. Persistent calls for constitutional and electoral reforms remained unresolved ahead of the elections, contributing to mistrust among political actors, civil society organizations, and



citizens. Key concerns included the independence of electoral institutions, limitations on judicial oversight of electoral disputes, restrictions on independent candidates, and concentration of powers within the executive and electoral management bodies.

The legal framework governing elections, including the Independent National Elections Act, 2024, the Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors' Elections Act, 2024, the Political Parties Act, and the Election Regulations of 2025, granted broad powers to electoral and regulatory authorities while limiting effective oversight and accountability mechanisms. Concerns were particularly raised regarding restrictions imposed on election observation, publication of observer findings, accreditation of observers, and limitations on public access to election-related information.


These developments significantly affected transparency, independent election monitoring, public participation, and confidence in electoral processes. The restrictions imposed on observers, journalists, and civil society organizations weakened independent scrutiny of the electoral process and contributed to shrinking civic and democratic space during the elections.

## **2.2 Administrative and Institutional Interference in Political Participation**

The 2025 electoral period was marked by growing concerns regarding administrative and institutional interference in political participation, opposition activities, and electoral processes. Decisions by the Registrar of Political Parties affecting CHADEMA leadership and internal governance, including revocation of appointments of senior party leaders, significantly affected opposition political activities during the election period. Court orders arising from internal party disputes were also used to restrict CHADEMA political rallies and meetings, while administrative and regulatory decisions later resulted in the party being barred from participating in the 2025 General Elections.

Concerns were also raised regarding actions and decisions of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) relating to nomination procedures, disqualification of candidates, and electoral management. Several court cases involving ACT Wazalendo presidential aspirant Luhaga Joelson Mpina challenged decisions of INEC and the Registrar of Political Parties relating to presidential nominations and electoral participation. Although the High Court in one case held that INEC had violated the petitioner's right to be heard and ordered restoration of the nomination process, other cases were dismissed or limited due to constitutional and statutory restrictions preventing judicial review of INEC decisions.

The election period was further characterized by arrests, detention, and restrictions targeting opposition leaders and supporters. The arrest and prosecution of



CHADEMA Chairperson Adv. Tundu Lissu, arrests of opposition supporters around court proceedings, and restrictions imposed on opposition political activities significantly affected political participation, freedom of association, and civic space. These developments contributed to shrinking political space, weakened public confidence in electoral institutions, and increased fear and uncertainty among political actors, Human Rights Defenders, journalists, and civil society organizations during the elections.

### **2.3 Arrest, Prosecution, and Trial of Adv. Tundu Antiphas Lissu**

The arrest and prosecution of CHADEMA Chairperson Adv. Tundu Antiphas Lissu on 9 April 2025 became one of the most significant political and human rights developments during the electoral period. He was arrested while addressing a public rally in Mbinga District and later charged with treason and publication of false information under the Cybercrimes Act.

The arrest, detention, and trial proceedings raised serious concerns regarding due process, fair trial guarantees, freedom of expression, and political participation. Trial observation reports and fact-finding missions documented allegations that he was arrested without being informed of charges at the time of arrest, prolonged pre-trial detention, restrictions on access to lawyers, limitations on confidential communication with legal counsel, restrictions on family visits, and surveillance during lawyer-client consultations.

Concerns were also raised regarding the use of force during his arrest, deployment of tear gas against supporters, transfer between prisons without notice, restrictions on public access to court proceedings, repeated procedural delays, and the use of virtual hearings in a politically sensitive case.

Administrative directives limiting attendance at court proceedings, including requiring submission of lists of persons permitted to attend hearings, raised concerns regarding open justice and public hearings. Journalists, lawyers, political supporters, and observers were in several instances denied access to court proceedings, arrested, assaulted, or harassed while attempting to attend the hearings.

The prosecution of a major opposition leader during the electoral period attracted significant national, regional, and international attention and became symbolic of broader concerns regarding criminalization of political dissent, judicial transparency, political participation, and shrinking civic space in Tanzania.



## 2.4 Restrictions on Journalists, Lawyers, Trial Observers, and Human Rights Defenders

The electoral period was characterized by increasing restrictions targeting journalists, lawyers, trial observers, and Human Rights Defenders. Journalists covering political events and court proceedings reported harassment, assault, arrest, confiscation of equipment, and restrictions while documenting election-related developments. Some journalists were reportedly forced to delete photographs and videos while others were beaten and temporarily detained.

Reports following the events of 24 April 2025 at Kisumu Resident Magistrate's Court indicated that police operations targeted not only opposition members and supporters but also journalists covering the proceedings. These actions raised serious concerns regarding media freedom, access to information, transparency of judicial proceedings, and the role of the media in ensuring public oversight during politically sensitive cases. Among the journalists were from VOT Media, including Francis Simba of Mwanzo TV and Grace Khuni of Global TV.


Restrictions also extended to lawyers and trial observers. On 15 September 2025, Advocate Deogratias Mahinyila was arrested by police officers at the High Court premises in Dar es Salaam while attending proceedings related to the treason case. The arrest was widely condemned by civil society organizations and legal bodies as interference with legal representation and the independence of the legal profession<sup>4</sup>.



*Advocate Mahinyila being apprehended by police officers, including both uniformed and plain-clothes officers*

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<sup>4</sup> Statement by THRDC available at [https://dailynews.co.tz/thrdc-condemns-the-arrest-of-pba-lawyer/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://dailynews.co.tz/thrdc-condemns-the-arrest-of-pba-lawyer/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)



Regional lawyers and human rights defenders who travelled to Tanzania to observe court proceedings involving opposition leaders were detained, denied entry, or deported. Among them were Kenyan advocates Martha Karua and Gloria Kimani, former Kenyan Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, and other regional activists and observers. These incidents attracted widespread regional and international condemnation and raised concerns regarding judicial transparency, freedom of movement within the East African Community, and protection of HRDs.

In addition, regional human rights defenders Boniface Mwangi and Agather Atuhaire were arrested and reportedly subjected to severe mistreatment, incommunicado detention, and torture after travelling to Tanzania to observe court proceedings. These incidents reflected increasing hostility toward independent monitoring, regional solidarity, and civic engagement during the electoral period.

The restrictions imposed on journalists, lawyers, observers, and HRDs significantly undermined press freedom, fair trial rights, access to information, and independent oversight during the elections.

## **2.5 Arrests, Violence, Killings, and Enforced Disappearances During the Election Period**

The election period was characterized by widespread reports of arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, torture, enforced disappearances, killings, and suppression of dissent. During proceedings involving Adv. Tundu Lissu at Kisumu Resident Magistrate's Court on 24 April 2025, police conducted large security operations around the court premises and arrested opposition leaders, supporters, journalists, and activists attempting to attend the proceedings.

Security forces reportedly used tear gas, police dogs, and physical force to disperse supporters and restrict access to the court. Victims later reported being subjected to arbitrary arrests, beatings, torture, incommunicado detention, and abandonment in remote areas and forests outside Dar es Salaam, including Mabwepande and Bagamoyo areas. Several victims required emergency medical treatment following the incidents.

The election period surrounding the 29 October 2025 General Elections was further marked by violent protests, security operations, curfews, mass arrests and killings, and deployment of security forces in several regions including Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Arusha, Mbeya, Mara, Iringa, and Njombe. Reports from media organizations, civil society organizations, and election observers indicated that security forces used



excessive force, including live ammunition and tear gas, against protesters and civilians.<sup>5</sup>



*Photos documenting incidents of electoral violence reported during the 2025 General Elections period*

Over 2,045 individuals were arrested in connection with election-related protests and unrest. Many were charged with serious offences including treason, armed robbery, and terrorism-related offences. Former detainees reported arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention, overcrowded detention facilities, torture, ill-treatment, and denial of access to lawyers and family members. For example, monitoring visits conducted by the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) at Oysterbay Police Station in Dar es Salaam found that more than 400 detainees were being held at the station at one point, indicating severe congestion and overcrowding in police custody. In addition, more than 240 individuals were charged with treason in Dar es Salaam at Kisutu Court starting from 7 November 2025 in connection with post-election protests and unrest. However, in December 2025 most of these cases were withdrawn by the Director of

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<sup>5</sup> Election observer mission reports and human rights documentation on protests, arrests, and use of force during the 2025 election period.

Public Prosecutions, resulting in the release of the majority of the accused persons, and by 31 December 2025 only nine accused persons remained facing treason charges in Dar es Salaam.



*A victim of ill-treatment by police while in detention and Baraka Mwita (on the right) was arraigned in court after severe torture, unable to walk and being carried by fellow detainees*

The election period was also marked by killings, abductions, and enforced disappearances linked to protests and security operations. Reports indicated that some individuals were arrested by unidentified security officers or plain-clothes officers and later disappeared or were detained in undisclosed locations without communication with families or lawyers. Human rights organizations and media reports documented allegations of extrajudicial killings and excessive use of force against civilians and protesters during security operations.



## **CNN finds evidence Tanzanian police killed protesters**


During 2025, THRDC documented incidents of three journalists who were killed in the context of election related violence, and more than 15 journalists were arrested or detained in connection with their work. Journalists were also subjected to harassment, physical assault, confiscation of equipment, and forced deletion of content.

These incidents created a climate of fear and insecurity during and after the elections and significantly affected civic engagement, political participation, public debate, and democratic participation.

### **2.6 Digital Repression and Internet Shutdowns**

Digital repression emerged as one of the defining features of the 2025 electoral period. Authorities implemented internet shutdowns, platform blocking, social media restrictions, and digital surveillance measures that significantly restricted access to information and communication during and after the elections.

One of the most significant incidents was the nationwide internet shutdown that occurred between 29 October and early November 2025, lasting for more than three days during and after the elections. During this period, internet access across the country was severely disrupted and several online platforms became inaccessible. The shutdown occurred during vote tallying, protests, and security operations, creating an information blackout at a critical moment of the electoral process.



Earlier in the year, access to X (formerly Twitter) was blocked, while social media throttling affecting platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Live was also reported. These restrictions significantly affected journalists, election observers, HRDs, civil society organizations, and citizens who relied on digital platforms to monitor elections, document violations, mobilize support, communicate, and share information in real time.

The internet shutdown and digital restrictions had serious implications on Human Rights Defenders and civic space. The shutdown disrupted communication among HRDs, limited documentation and reporting of violations, weakened election monitoring efforts, restricted public access to information, and undermined freedom of expression and access to information. It also created fear and uncertainty among activists, journalists, and online commentators and contributed to self-censorship during the electoral period.

In addition, the shutdown affected businesses, financial transactions, media operations, and digital services that depended on internet connectivity, demonstrating that digital repression during elections had both human rights and economic consequences.

## **2.7 International and Regional Reactions to the Elections**

The conduct of the 2025 elections attracted significant attention and reactions from regional and international actors, including the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC), European Union (EU), international human rights organizations, and foreign governments.

Election observation missions raised concerns regarding violence, arrests of opposition leaders, restrictions on political participation, internet shutdowns, limitations on civic space, and lack of transparency during the electoral process. International observers also highlighted concerns regarding intimidation, restrictions on journalists and observers, excessive use of force, and irregularities in vote counting and results management processes.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention later concluded that the detention of Adv. Tundu Lissu was arbitrary and inconsistent with international human rights standards relating to liberty, fair trial rights, freedom of expression, and political participation.

International reactions placed the elections within a broader discussion regarding democratic governance, rule of law, human rights, and civic space in Tanzania and contributed to increased international scrutiny of Tanzania's electoral environment.



## **2.8 Implications of the 2025 Elections on Human Rights Defenders and Civic Space**

The 2025 General Elections had significant implications for Human Rights Defenders and civic space in Tanzania. HRDs, journalists, lawyers, election observers, civil society organizations, and online activists faced heightened risks while documenting violations, monitoring elections, providing legal assistance, and advocating for accountability and democratic governance.

The electoral environment was characterized by intimidation, arbitrary arrests, killings, enforced disappearances, digital attacks, internet shutdowns, restrictions on peaceful assembly, and limitations on freedom of expression, association, and political participation. The targeting of opposition leaders, journalists, lawyers, and observers contributed to shrinking civic and political space and weakened public confidence in democratic institutions and accountability mechanisms.

The curfew, military deployment, internet shutdowns, and large-scale security operations during and after the 2025 General Elections significantly affected Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and civic space in Tanzania. These measures restricted movement, communication, election monitoring, documentation of violations, and public participation. Reports of excessive use of force, killings, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation created fear and self-censorship among HRDs, journalists, activists, and opposition supporters, while internet shutdowns limited access to information and independent reporting during a critical electoral period.

The events documented during the electoral period demonstrated the vulnerability of HRDs and civic actors during politically sensitive periods and highlighted the urgent need for stronger legal protections, institutional accountability, judicial independence, and reforms aimed at safeguarding civic space, democratic participation, and fundamental freedoms in Tanzania.

## **2.9 Post-Election State Response and Accountability Concerns**

Following the post-election unrest and mass arrests after the 29 October 2025 General Elections, the President announced on 14 November 2025 that the government would review cases involving individuals arrested during the protests and release those not involved in serious offences. The President also announced the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the post-election violence, killings, and destruction of property as part of reconciliation efforts.

However, despite these announcements, many individuals remained in detention facing serious charges including treason and terrorism-related offences. By March 2026, over 50 individuals were reportedly still facing treason charges in different



regions of the country. Concerns were also raised regarding the effectiveness and credibility of the Commission of Inquiry and the government's response to criticism from international observers and human rights organizations, which it viewed as interference in domestic affairs.

These developments contributed to uncertainty among Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), civil society organizations, and opposition actors, and further affected civic participation and public confidence in accountability and justice processes.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The 2025 General Elections exposed significant challenges relating to democratic governance, protection of Human Rights Defenders, and civic space in Tanzania. The restrictions, arrests, intimidation, enforced disappearances, internet shutdowns, violence, and attacks documented during the electoral period reflected a broader pattern of shrinking civic and political space.

The experiences of HRDs, journalists, lawyers, opposition supporters, and civil society actors during the elections underscored the need for comprehensive legal and institutional reforms to ensure protection of fundamental freedoms, transparency, accountability, electoral justice, and meaningful democratic participation in Tanzania.

# THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN TANZANIA

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the situation of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Tanzania during the year 2025. It examines the legal and policy environment affecting HRDs, patterns of violations committed against HRDs, strategic litigation and criminal cases involving HRDs, documented abductions and enforced disappearances, institutional responses, and the broader challenges affecting human rights work in the country.

During the reporting period, human rights defenders in Tanzania operated in an increasingly restrictive environment characterized by legal pressure, criminal prosecution, threats, abductions, surveillance, digital repression, and administrative restrictions on civil society, media, and political participation. Violations were perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, and in many cases, investigations were either not conducted or were not concluded, contributing to a growing climate of fear and impunity.

The situation of HRDs in 2025 cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader political and governance environment, particularly the 2025 general elections, which were associated with increased restrictions on civic space, digital repression, arrests of political actors and activists, and widespread reports of abductions and enforced disappearances. The cumulative effect of these developments significantly constrained the operational environment for human rights work in Tanzania.

## 3.2 Legal and Policy Environment Affecting Human Rights Defenders

The legal and policy environment in Tanzania continues to significantly affect the work of human rights defenders. Several laws and regulations have been applied in ways that restrict civic engagement, digital expression, media freedom, and political participation. Key laws affecting HRDs include:



### **3.2.1 The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977**

This is the supreme law of the land which guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms including freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly, the right to participate in public affairs, and the right to personal liberty. These rights form the legal foundation for the work of human rights defenders, civil society organizations, journalists, and political activists in Tanzania.

However, while the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights, some constitutional provisions relating to electoral governance, judicial review, and institutional powers have significant implications for civic space, political participation, and the work of human rights defenders.

In particular, Article 74 of the Constitution establishes the National Electoral Commission and grants it authority to supervise and manage elections. However, Article 74(12) provides that decisions of the Electoral Commission in the discharge of its functions shall not be questioned in any court of law. This provision limits judicial oversight over electoral decisions and restricts access to legal remedies in electoral matters, which affects civil society organizations, election observers, political actors, and human rights defenders engaged in electoral justice and election monitoring.

Similarly, Article 41(7) of the Constitution provides that once the Electoral Commission has declared the results of the presidential election, no court shall have jurisdiction to inquire into the election of the President. This provision effectively bars judicial review of presidential election results and limits legal accountability and electoral justice mechanisms. This has significant implications for political activists, civil society organizations, and human rights defenders working on electoral transparency, democratic governance, and rule of law.

### **3.2.2 Domestic Laws and Policies**

#### **A) The Societies Act [Cap 337 R.E 2023]**

This law regulates the registration and operation of associations, societies, and organizations and grants powers to the Registrar of Societies to refuse registration, suspend, or deregister organizations on various grounds, including where an organization is considered to operate contrary to public interest or national security. The application of this law has implications for civic organizations, religious institutions, and advocacy groups. For example, on 2 June 2025, the Government suspended The Church of Glory of Christ Tanzania (CGCT) under the Societies Act, citing alleged violations of registration and operational requirements. The suspension raised concerns among civil society organizations regarding the broad discretionary powers of the Registrar of Societies and the potential use of administrative laws to



restrict organizations, religious institutions, and groups perceived to be critical or politically active.

### **B) The Electronic and Postal Communications Act, Cap. 306, R.E 2023**

This law regulates electronic communications, broadcasting, and online services and grants regulatory powers to the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) over telecommunications, broadcasting services, and electronic communications content. The law has been applied in regulating online television platforms, radio stations, and digital communication services, including licensing requirements and content regulation. For example, in September 2025, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority suspended the online platform Jamii Forums for 90 days, alleging that the platform had published content that was misleading to the public and threatening national unity.

### **C) The Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, 2020**

These regulations provide detailed rules governing online content providers including blogs, online television, streaming platforms, social media content, and digital platforms, and require online content providers to obtain licenses and comply with content standards set by the regulator. The regulations also allow authorities to remove content, suspend platforms, and impose penalties for non-compliance. For example, on 6 September 2025, journalists and online television operators Ezekiel Mollel of Manara TV and Baraka Lucas of Jambo TV were arrested in Arusha for allegedly operating online television platforms without registration.

### **D) The Political Parties Act, Cap. 258, R.E 2023 (as amended by the Political Parties (Amendment) Act, No. 1 of 2019)**

This law regulates the registration and operation of political parties and grants extensive powers to the Registrar of Political Parties, including powers to supervise internal party processes, demand information, suspend party activities, and refuse to recognize party leadership or internal decisions. The application of this law has significant implications for political participation, civic space, and the work of human rights defenders engaged in governance and democracy advocacy. For example, on 13 May 2025, the Registrar of Political Parties refused to recognize the appointments of several senior leaders of Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), including members of the party secretariat and central committee, following internal party decisions made earlier in January 2025. The Registrar directed the party to reconvene its decision-making organs and declared the appointments invalid, which led to legal disputes between the party and the Registrar and raised concerns regarding administrative interference in internal political party governance and political pluralism.



### **E) The Prevention of Terrorism Act, No. 21 of 2002**

This law contains broad definitions of terrorism-related offences and grants extensive powers to law enforcement and security authorities in relation to investigation, arrest, detention, and prosecution of terrorism-related offences. While the Act is intended to address national security threats, concerns have been raised regarding its potential use in cases involving activists and political actors. For example, following demonstrations related to the 29 October 2025 general elections, five political leaders and activists were arrested in Kigoma Region and charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, raising concerns about the use of national security legislation in matters related to political demonstrations, civic engagement, and political participation.

### **F) The Immigration Act, Cap. 54 R.E 2023**

This law regulates the entry, residence, and deportation of non-citizens in Tanzania and grants immigration authorities powers to deny entry or deport individuals where deemed necessary in the public interest. The law has, in some instances, been applied in cases involving foreign human rights defenders, and lawyers. For example, in May 2025, Kenyan advocates and human rights defenders, including Advocate Martha Karua, Gloria Kimani, Lynn Ngugi, and former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, were denied entry into Tanzania and deported to Kenya after travelling to attend trial observation proceedings related to the case of opposition leader Adv. Tundu Lissu.

### **G) The Police Force and Auxiliary Services Act, Cap. 322, R.E 2023**

This law regulates the powers and functions of the Tanzania Police Force, including powers relating to maintenance of public order, public assemblies, demonstrations, and public meetings. The law is often applied in the regulation of political gatherings, protests, and public meetings organized by political parties, civil society organizations, and activists. For example, on 24 April 2025, police officers arrested and dispersed more than 20 members and supporters of the opposition party, CHADEMA who had gathered near the Resident Magistrate's Court at Kisutu, Dar es Salaam, during the court appearance of opposition leader Adv. Tundu Lissu.

### **H) The Film and Stage Plays Act, Cap. 230 R.E 2023**

This law regulates films, music, artistic works, and public performances through licensing and censorship powers exercised by regulatory authorities such as the National Arts Council (BASATA). The law has been used to regulate and in some cases ban artistic content considered political, critical of the government, or likely to disturb public order. For example, in October 2025, the National Arts Council of Tanzania



(BASATA) banned the song “*Afande Teremsha Bunduki*” by artist Roma Mkatoliki from being played on media platforms, on the grounds that the song contained political content and messages relating to state violence and security forces.

#### **I) The Media Services Act, 2016**

This law regulates media services, accreditation of journalists, content standards, and grants powers to regulatory authorities to suspend or ban media outlets and sanction journalists for content considered to violate media laws or regulations. The law also establishes the Journalists Accreditation Board and provides requirements for journalist accreditation. For example, on 18 July 2025, the Journalists Accreditation Board banned four radio presenters from Mjini FM Ms. Deodatha William, Mussa Chrispin Mgenge, Perfect Crispin, and Iddy Bakari Iddy after they hosted an interview with Singeli artist Dogo Paten on the program *Genge la Gen Tok*, citing lack of professionalism and accreditation issues. The decision also affected other media practitioners, including cartoonist and presenter Masoud Kipanya, who were barred from engaging in media related activities due to accreditation requirements.

#### **J) The Cybercrimes Act, 2015**

This law criminalizes various online activities including publication of false information, cyber harassment, identity theft, and unauthorized access to computer systems. Several provisions of the Act, particularly those relating to publication of false information and online content offences, have been used in cases involving online activists, journalists, bloggers, and political commentators. For example, on 27 June 2025, the owners of the Wachokonozi Online platform, Jackson Kabalo and Joseph Mrindoko, were charged in Arusha under the Cybercrimes Act for allegedly publishing false information online

#### **K) The Non-Governmental Organizations Act, No. 24 of 2002**

This law regulates the registration, reporting, coordination, and operations of non-governmental organizations and gives powers to the Registrar of NGOs to suspend or deregister organizations for non-compliance, which affects the operational environment for civil society organizations and human rights defenders.

#### **L) The Non-Governmental Organizations Regulations, 2018 (Government Notice No. 609 of 2018)**

These regulations impose reporting and compliance requirements on NGOs, including financial reporting and activity reporting obligations, and provide administrative powers to regulatory authorities over NGO operations.



### **M) The Statistics Act, Cap. 351 R.E 2023**

This law regulates collection and publication of statistical data and has previously been criticized for restricting independent research and publication of data without approval from the National Bureau of Statistics.

### **N) The Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors' Elections Act, No. 1 of 2024**

This law regulates the conduct of presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections and includes provisions relating to nomination, campaigns, election observation, and election results management.

### **O) The Independent National Elections Act, No. 2 of 2024**

This law establishes the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and regulates the administration and management of elections, including voter registration, nomination processes, election supervision, and announcement of election results. The Act also empowers the Commission to issue regulations and guidelines governing election observation, accreditation of observers, voter education providers, and media coverage during elections. For example, in April 2025, the Independent National Electoral Commission issued Accreditation Guidelines and Procedures for Domestic and International Election Observers for the 2025 General Elections<sup>6</sup>, issued pursuant to Regulation 13(1) and (2) of the Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors' Elections Regulations, 2025, which required observer organizations to apply for accreditation through the Commission and comply with conditions governing observer conduct, reporting, and access to polling and tallying centers.

### **P) Media Accreditation and Regulation of Election Coverage during the 2025 General Elections**

Ahead of the 2025 General Elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) issued directives requiring journalists and media institutions intending to report on election activities to obtain accreditation from the Commission through its Accreditation Management System. The accreditation process required media houses and journalists to apply online and be approved before being allowed to cover election-related activities, including campaign events, polling, vote counting, and announcement of results. This requirement was implemented within the broader electoral legal framework governing election stakeholders' participation and media conduct during elections, including the Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors'

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.inec.go.tz/uploads/documents/sw-1745207616 INVITATION%20FOR%20INTERNATIONAL%20ELECTORA%20OBSERVERS.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.inec.go.tz/uploads/documents/sw-1745207616%20INVITATION%20FOR%20INTERNATIONAL%20ELECTORA%20OBSERVERS.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Elections Regulations made under the National Elections Act, as well as the Media Services Act, 2016. In particular, Section 19 of the Media Services Act, 2016 provides for accreditation of journalists through the Journalists Accreditation Board and issuance of press cards, making journalist accreditation a legal requirement before practising journalism.



**JAMHURI YA MUUNGANO WA TANZANIA**  
**TUME HURU YA TAIFA YA UCHAGUZI**



**TANGAZO LA MWALIKO KWA VYOMBO VYA HABARI VYENYE  
NIA YA KUCHAPISHA AU KUTANGAZA HABARI WAKATI WA  
KUPIGA KURA, KUHE SABU KURA NA KUTANGAZA MATOKEO  
KWENYE UCHAGUZI MKUU WA MWAKA 2025**

Kwa kuzingatia kifungu cha 26 cha Sheria ya Tume Huru ya Taifa Uchaguzi Na. 2 ya Mwaka 2024, Tume Huru ya Taifa ya Uchaguzi inatoa mwaliko kwa vyombo vya habari vyenye nia ya kuchapisha au kutangaza habari wakati wa kupiga kura, kuhesabu kura na kutangaza matokeo.

Chombo cha Habari kinachohitaji kuomba kibali kinapaswa kuwa na sifa au vigezo vifuatavyo:

- (i) kiwe kimesajiliwa kwa mujibu wa Sheria ya Huduma za Vyombo vya Habari ya Mwaka 2016; na
- (ii) kihakikishe kuwa waandishi wake wamethibitishwa na Bodi ya Ithibati ya Waandishi wa Habari na wana *Press Cards* zilizotolewa na Bodi hiyo.

Maombi yawasilishwe kupitia mfumo wa usajili **Accreditation Management System (AMS)** unaopatikana kupitia kiunganishi (link) <https://ams.inec.go.tz>. Maombi yatapokelewa kuanzia tarehe **03 Septemba, 2025 hadi 03 Oktoba, 2025**.

Aidha, maombi yatakayotumwa kwa njia tofauti na mfumo ulioainishwa hayatafanyiwa kazi.

Tume haitahusika na utoaji wa rasilimali fedha au rasilimali nyingine kwa vyombo vya habari vitakavyopewa kibali.

Limetolewa leo tarehe 03 Septemba, 2025 na:

Kailima, R. K.  
**MKURUGENZI WA UCHAGUZI**



*Statement issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) requiring media houses and journalists intending to report on elections to be registered and accredited*

The Journalists Accreditation Board was officially launched on March 3, 2025, in Dar es Salaam to oversee registration and accreditation of journalists and issuance of press cards as provided under the Media Services Act. Subsequently, on July 9, 2025, the Government officially launched the TAI HABARI digital registration system, which was used by the Journalists Accreditation Board to register journalists and issue digital press cards ahead of the 2025 General Elections. Journalists were therefore required to register through this system and obtain official press cards before being recognized for election coverage.



*Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy, Dr. Doto Biteko, during the launch of the TAI HABARI system for journalist registration by the Journalists Accreditation Board on 9 July 2025*

In addition to journalist accreditation under the Media Services Act, journalists were also required to obtain election accreditation issued by INEC in order to access polling stations, counting centres, and other election processes. As a result, journalists covering the 2025 General Elections were required to have both journalist accreditation under the Media Services Act, 2016, and election accreditation issued by INEC in order to access and report election processes. The accreditation requirement meant that only journalists approved by INEC and relevant regulatory authorities were allowed to report election processes, which had implications for independent election coverage and access to information during the election period.



### **Q) The Regulations for the Election of the President, Members of Parliament and Councillors, 2025**

These regulations introduced rules governing election observers, media coverage, accreditation, campaign procedures, and results management.

### **R) The Access to Information Act, No. 6 of 2016**

This law regulates access to information held by public authorities but includes several exemptions that may limit access to information.

### **S) The Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act, No. 3 of 2019**

This law amended several pieces of legislation affecting non-governmental organizations, media, statistics, and other regulatory frameworks affecting civic space. Among its significant amendments, the Act introduced a requirement for non-governmental organizations to renew their registration certificates every ten years, thereby increasing administrative control and regulatory oversight over civil society organizations. The amendment has implications for the operational stability and sustainability of civil society organizations and human rights defenders operating through NGOs.

### **T) The Basic Rights and Duties Enforcement Act, Cap. 3, R.E 2023**

This law governs constitutional petitions and public interest litigation in Tanzania and provides procedures for enforcement of basic rights and duties under the Constitution. Amendments introduced through the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act, No. 3 of 2020 introduced stricter procedural requirements for filing constitutional petitions, including requirements relating to affidavits, locus standi, and procedural thresholds, which have affected access to constitutional justice and public interest litigation, particularly for civil society organizations and human rights defenders seeking to challenge unconstitutional laws and actions.

These laws have been used to regulate online content, restrict media operations, impose administrative controls on civil society organizations, restrict political participation, and criminalize certain forms of expression. In practice, these laws have enabled administrative harassment, criminal prosecution, surveillance, censorship, and intimidation of human rights defenders, journalists, activists, and political actors. The cumulative effect of these legal and regulatory measures has been to create a restrictive civic environment that limits freedom of expression, association, assembly, and access to information, thereby affecting the ability of human rights defenders to operate freely and safely.



### **3.3 Patterns of Violations Against Human Rights Defenders**

During 2025, Tanzania experienced a range of human rights violations affecting HRDs, activists, lawyers, journalists, business people, political actors, and ordinary people. These violations included arbitrary arrests, abductions and enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, threats and intimidation, digital repression, restrictions on media, and violations against land and environmental defenders. These violations occurred in different parts of the country and were particularly pronounced during the election period.

#### **3.3.1 Arbitrary Arrests and Detention**

Human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, activists, and political actors were subjected to arbitrary arrests and detention during the reporting period, often linked to their public statements, political activities, reporting, or human rights work. In many cases, arrests were conducted during public gatherings, demonstrations, court proceedings, or while individuals were performing professional duties such as journalism, or political mobilization.

Journalists and online media operators were arrested under the Cybercrimes Act and the Electronic and Postal Communications Act for allegedly publishing false information or operating online platforms without licenses. For example, on 27 June 2025, the owners of the Wachokonozi online platform, Jackson Kabalo and Joseph Mrindoko, were arrested in Arusha and charged with publishing false information online and operating an online platform without a license. Their devices and equipment were confiscated and were not returned, affecting their ability to continue their work and operate their online platform.

Similarly, journalists and media presenters were detained or banned from practicing journalism under accreditation regulations. For example, on 18 July 2025, the Journalists Accreditation Board banned four radio presenters from Mjini FM Ms. Deodatha William, Mussa Chrispin Mgenge, Perfect Crispin, and Iddy Bakari Iddy after they hosted an interview with Singeli artist Dogo Paten, citing accreditation and professionalism issues.

Journalists were also arrested while covering demonstrations and election related events. For example, Godfrey Thomas Ng'omba, a journalist with Ayo TV, was detained by police in Arusha from 30 October to 4 November 2025 after allegedly recording demonstrations related to the elections. He was later rearrested and charged with treason before the charges were eventually withdrawn following a presidential directive.



On 6 September 2025, online television journalists Ezekiel Mollel of Manara TV and Baraka Lucas of Jambo TV were arrested in Arusha for allegedly operating online television platforms without registration contrary to the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, and their equipment was confiscated.

Journalists covering demonstrations were also arrested or detained in different parts of the country. For instance, on 22 October 2025, journalist Jumbe Ismail of Channel Ten was detained by police in Singida while attempting to cover a political campaign event and was later released without charges.


### **3.3.2 Abductions and Enforced Disappearances**

Abductions and enforced disappearances were among the most serious human rights concerns documented in Tanzania during 2025. THRDC documented 42 incidents of abductions and attacks involving human rights defenders, activists, political actors, journalists, and ordinary citizens. Information received from relatives, witnesses, and victims indicates that many of the abductions were carried out by unidentified individuals, often armed and in some cases identified themselves as police officers or security personnel.

In several incidents, victims were taken from their homes, workplaces, or public spaces, frequently during night operations or in circumstances suggesting surveillance or targeted operations. In many cases, the whereabouts of the victims remained unknown for extended periods, raising serious concerns about enforced disappearances and violations of the rights to liberty, security of person, and protection from arbitrary detention.

While some victims were later found injured or abandoned in remote locations, and a few were released following public pressure and media attention, a significant number of victims remain missing to date. The continued occurrence of abductions without prompt, thorough, and transparent investigations has created widespread fear and uncertainty among human rights defenders and the general public. This situation has had a chilling effect on civic engagement, political participation, and freedom of expression in Tanzania.

The incidents documented in 2025 are not isolated events but form part of a broader pattern observed over the past decade. According to previous THRDC situation reports, more than 100 incidents of abductions, enforced disappearances, and attempted abductions were documented between 2014 and 2024 involving journalists, political actors, activists, businesspersons, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens. Many of these cases remain unresolved, with victims still missing and perpetrators not held accountable. The recurrence of such incidents over several years indicates a pattern of enforced disappearances and highlights serious gaps in




investigation, accountability, and protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and citizens in Tanzania.

- a) On 5 January 2025, Dastan Mutajula, a government employee, was reportedly abducted in Buza, Temeke District, Dar es Salaam. The circumstances surrounding his disappearance remain unclear. Since the incident, no official information has been provided regarding his fate or whereabouts. The continued lack of clarity has raised serious concerns about a possible enforced disappearance and the failure of authorities to ensure accountability and protection of the right to liberty and security of persons.
- b) Maria Sarungi Tsehai was abducted on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya. She was taken away in a Toyota Noah vehicle in the Kilimani neighborhood. After several public statements, she was released by the abductors. She is known for being a critic of the Government of Tanzania.
- c) On 8<sup>th</sup> February 2025, three individuals Mr. Muriba Mugahu Muhere, Chairperson of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) at Itiro Ward, Lucas Mwera Chacha, and Mwita Ghati Gesabo were reportedly abducted in Itiro Ward, Tarime District. On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025, the Tanzanian Police Force issued a statement acknowledging the incident and pledged to conduct an investigation into the abduction. Despite this public commitment, no investigation report has been issued to the public, and the whereabouts of the three individuals remain unknown.
- d) Amani Manengelo, CHADEMA Youth Wing Regional Leader in Mwanza, was on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025 reported to have been abducted by unknown men who introduced themselves as police officers. On 18<sup>th</sup> February, the Mwanza Regional Commissioner ordered the police to investigate the incident. However, to date, his whereabouts remain unknown, and investigations are reportedly ongoing.
- e) Method Damian Kumdyanko was reported to have been abducted on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025 by eight people at his residence in Sinza, Dar es Salaam. His whereabouts remain unknown to date.
- f) Daniel Chonchorio, a former CCM Member of Parliament, was abducted on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2025 by unknown individuals while exercising. The abductors identified themselves as police officers. Police later urged the public to share any information about his location, but he has not been found to date.



- g) Dr. Hashim Titto was reported missing on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025 in Dar es Salaam. His body was found dead at Coco Beach on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2025. Dr. Titto was pursuing studies at Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences.
- h) Mpaluka Said Nyangali (Mdude), a human rights activist and opposition party member, was reported to have been abducted on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025 at his home in Mbeya. At around 2:00 a.m., armed individuals claiming to be police officers broke into his home, assaulted him in front of his wife and infant child, and abducted him, leaving behind a pool of blood. Since then, he has not been found. Mdude, a well-known critic of government policies, has been a repeated victim of abduction.
- i) Mr. Juma Kaswahili, a CHADEMA member, was abducted on the night of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025 by unknown individuals while traveling from Kahama–Shinyanga to Dar es Salaam. His whereabouts remain unknown to this day.
- j) Sheikh Zuberi Nkonkoo, a religious teacher with the Islam Foundation in Singida, was reported missing on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2025 by his family, who suspected abduction. On 18<sup>th</sup> June, however, police stated that Sheikh Nkonkoo had staged his own abduction in an attempt to escape debts amounting to 502 million TZS.
- k) On 15<sup>th</sup> June 2025, Japhet Matarra was attacked in Dar es Salaam and sustained serious injuries. He was taken to the hospital for treatment; however, the attackers remained unidentified. His jaw was broken, and he reported that the assailants stole all his money before fleeing the scene.
- l) Stanslaus Nyangoko Roman was abducted on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2025 by unidentified people at Buriba, Tarime, Mara Region. The Regional Police Commander issued a public statement confirming receipt of the information and that investigations were underway.
- m) Ben Bernad Mselle was abducted on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at his residence in Goba, Ubungo, Dar es Salaam. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
- n) Mbeshi Paulo, CHADEMA Youth Leader in Geita Region, was abducted on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2025 by men who introduced themselves as police officers. His family searched all police posts in vain, and his whereabouts remain unknown. The incident occurred shortly after he mobilized youth to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

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- o) Anastazia Mwamongi, a Chadema cadre, was attacked at her home and killed by unidentified people on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2025 at Kihesa, Iringa, Tanzania. The reasons for the attack remain unknown to date.
  - p) Joseph Lema was reported missing under unclear circumstances on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2025 in Moshi after unidentified people called him regarding a job opportunity. He never returned. Mr. Lema left behind a wife and two children aged four years and three months, respectively. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
  - q) Mwabili Mwangodi, a Kenyan human rights activist, was abducted on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 2025, he was found dumped in Kinondo, Diani County, Kenya, with visible signs of torture sustained during the abduction.
  - r) Siza Mwita Kaheta, a CCM councilor contestant, disappeared under unclear circumstances on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2025. According to family accounts, his phone went off, and later his car was found abandoned in Tabora without him or his companion. Police stated that investigations were ongoing.
  - s) Gideon Mlokozi Mashankara, an entrepreneur working in a car showroom, was taken on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2025 by five men who identified themselves as police officers. Witnesses reported that he was told he was being taken to Tabata Bima Police Station. However, his family could not trace him at any police station and later filed a court case. Police maintain that investigations are ongoing.
  - t) Mrs. Godwin Mollel, the former Deputy Minister of Health, was abducted on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2025. She was beaten, and her car was burnt. However, investigations were promptly conducted, and perpetrators were apprehended.
  - u) Elisha Juma (popularly known as Injili Igeuzayo Roho), a gospel singer, was abducted on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2025 by three unidentified men in Katente Ward, Bukombe District, Geita Region. On 21<sup>st</sup> August, police announced that investigations had begun. The abduction followed the release of his politically sensitive song criticizing the October elections and calling for constitutional reform.
  - v) Al-Hajj Nourdin Mushi was abducted on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2025 in Dar es Salaam. To date, his whereabouts remain unknown.



- w) Lobezi Kulilo Masanyiwa was abducted on 1st October 2025 at Nyamikoma, Magu Mwanza. To date his whereabouts are unknown.
- x) Paul Veslas was abducted in Ikungu Singida on 3rd October 2025. To date his whereabouts is unknown.
- y) Aron Massawe was abducted on 3rd October 2025 at Kariakoo, Ilala, Dar es Salaam. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
- z) Kelvin Mushi was abducted on 3rd October 2025 at Kariakoo, Ilala, Dar es Salaam. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
- aa) Pastor Elias Domisiani from Morogoro was abducted on 4th October 2025. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
- ab) Amos Pambala was abducted in Morogoro, Tanzania on 4th October 2025. To date his whereabouts is unknown.
- ac) Ibrahim Muhidini and three other people was abducted at Kahama in Shinyanga region on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2025. To date their whereabouts are unknown.
- ad) Abednego Sanga was abducted on 4th October 2025 at Lupembe area in Njombe. To date his whereabouts is unknown.
- ae) Issa Hamisi, Chairperson of the Chadema Youth Wing at Ikungu Ward, was abducted on 4th October 2025.
- af) Evarest James Ramadhan, Chairperson of the Chadema Youth Wing at Ikungu District, was abducted on 5th October 2025.
- ag) Ntihakaniwa Kiba, an evangelist for the Anglican Church, was abducted on 6th October 2025 at Cheyo B in Tabora Municipality, Tanzania. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
- ah) Humphrey Polepole, former Ambassador, Member of Parliament, and Secretary of Ideology for CCM, was abducted on 6th October 2025. The Police Force spokesperson, DCP David Misime, issued a statement that the Police were investigating the incident. However, despite a habeas corpus application filed in the High Court of Tanzania, his whereabouts remain unknown.
- ai) Rogers Ludovick, a businessperson and resident of Bwawani, Dumila in Kilosa, was abducted by three people on 7th October 2025. The Regional Police Commander for Morogoro issued a press statement on 8th October 2025 indicating that the Police Force was investigating the incident.

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- aj) Fr. Camillus Nikata was reported missing on 7th October 2025, prompting public concern. On 10th October 2025, Archbishop Damian Denis Dallu of the Catholic Archdiocese of Songea issued a statement appealing for prayers and support in locating him. On 17th October 2025, the Police announced that Fr. Nikata had been found at his residence in Mawa Village, Hanga Ward, Namtumbo District, Ruvuma Region. The police claimed he had staged his own abduction due to debts and psychological distress. However, the Roman Catholic Church publicly disputed this version, maintaining that the circumstances surrounding his disappearance remain unclear and concerning.
  - ak) Gimase Joseph and Isaya were abducted on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2025 in Sirari, Tarime, Mara, Tanzania.
  - al) Ibrahim Richard was abducted on 8th October 2025 at Magu Town in Mwanza Region. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
  - am) Jerison Keraliyo, a resident of Kishili, Nyamagana District in Mwanza, was abducted on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2025. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
  - an) Ayubu Juma was reported missing on 10th October 2025. He was residing in Ikungi, Singida, and to date, his whereabouts remain unknown.
  - ao) Sinda Mseti was reported missing on 12th October 2025 in Mara, Tanzania. To date, his whereabouts are unknown.
  - ap) Debora Ngao was reported missing on 17th October 2025 at Mnazi Mmoja, Lumumba, Dar es Salaam. Her parents reported the matter to the Police; however, her whereabouts remain unknown to date.

### **3.3.3 Threats and Intimidation**

Human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, religious leaders, activists, artists, and political actors were subjected to threats, intimidation, warnings, harassment, and public attacks due to their work, public statements, reporting, or advocacy activities. These acts of intimidation were carried out by public officials, law enforcement officers, regulatory authorities, unidentified individuals, and in some cases through public statements and legal threats.

THRDC documented 20 incidents of threats and intimidation during 2025 affecting 13 specifically identified individuals, 4 journalists and media presenters, 1 journalist shot to death, 11 online television platforms in Zanzibar suspended, as well as numerous activists and social media users intimidated.



**a) 17 January 2025 attack on journalist Charles Mwita**

Journalist Mwita was shot by unidentified individuals in Tarime while performing his journalistic duties. The Tanzania Police Force issued a public statement that investigations would be conducted; however, no public findings had been released at the time of reporting.

**b) 9 April 2025 Arrest and treason charges against Tundu Lissu**

The arrest and prosecution of opposition leader Adv. Tundu Lissu in relation to political statements and the *"No Reforms, No Election"* campaign was widely viewed by civil society and international organizations as intimidation and criminalization of political expression and dissent.

**c) 30 April 2025 Attack on Fr. Charles Kitima**

The Catholic priest and Secretary General of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, Fr. Charles Kitima, was physically attacked by undisclosed assailants following his public statements on governance, democracy, and electoral justice ahead of the 2025 general elections.

**d) 2 May 2025 Abduction of activist Mdude Nyagali**

The abduction of a human rights activist Mpaluka Said Nyangali @Mdude Nyagali, was abducted by unknown individuals believed to be security officers shortly after posting critical messages on social media regarding governance and political issues. He was reportedly taken by armed men who arrived in a vehicle and forcibly took him away, and his whereabouts remain unknown to date.

**e) 8 May 2025 Bishop Dr. Benson Bagonza**

Bishop Dr. Benson Bagonza reported receiving threats and intimidation through phone calls and messages after making public statements and sermons addressing governance, democracy, and political accountability ahead of the 2025 elections.

**f) 15 May 2025 Advocate Boniface Mwabukusi, TLS President threatened**

On 15 May 2025, Advocate Boniface Mwabukusi reported that he received death threats and intimidation through phone calls and text messages from unknown individuals after filing and pursuing a legal case concerning the disappearance of activist Mdude Nyagali. The incident raised serious concerns about the safety of lawyers handling human rights and enforced disappearance cases.



**g) 21 May 2025 onwards Blocking access to X (Twitter)**

Blocking access to the platform limited communication and online expression and was widely perceived as intimidation and restriction of digital civic space.

**h) June 2025 Online intimidation related to the “No Reforms, No Election” campaign**

Individuals posting or supporting the online campaign of “No Reforms, No Election” reported threats, warnings, and monitoring of social media activities.

**i) 18 July 2025 Journalists banned by the Journalists Accreditation Board**  
Four media presenters were banned from practicing journalism after hosting a controversial interview, which contributed to intimidation and self censorship among journalists.

**j) 4 September 2025 Assault and detention of journalist Marco Kilo**

Journalist Marco Kilo of East Africa Television was assaulted and detained by officials of the Dar Rapid Transit Agency (UDART) while reporting on passenger congestion at the Mbezi Luis bus terminal in Dar es Salaam. His phone and camera equipment were confiscated, and some of the recorded files and images were deleted before the equipment was later returned.

**k) 6 September 2025 Suspension of JamiiForums licence**

The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) suspended the online content licence of JamiiForums for 90 days for allegedly publishing misleading and unverified content and failing to moderate user generated content in accordance with online content regulations. The suspension occurred during a politically sensitive period ahead of the 2025 general elections and was considered intimidation and a restriction of online platforms, digital expression, and civic

**l) 19 October 2025 Advocate Edward Heche threatened**

Advocate Edward Heche reported that he was threatened by a Regional Crimes Officer in Tarime who warned him that people would soon be campaigning for his release.

**m) 20 October 2025 Warning issued to multiple online TV platforms in Zanzibar**

On 20 October 2025, the Zanzibar Broadcasting Commission issued a warning to eleven online television platforms for allegedly operating in violation of broadcasting regulations and threatened legal action against them. The



platforms included *TIFU Online TV, Marhaba Online TV, Vuga Online TV, Busati Online TV, Kasusi Online TV, Digital Online TV, Leaders Online TV, Zanzibar Yetu Online TV, Mawengi Online TV, Jimbi Online TV, and MU Online TV*. The decision was made during the election period and raised concerns among media stakeholders that the warning could restrict media freedom and access to information.

**n) 21 October 2025 Ban of Roma Mkatoliki**

The National Arts Council of Tanzania (BASATA) banned the song “Afande Teremsha Bunduki” by Roma Mkatoliki for allegedly violating content regulations due to its criticism of police violence. The ban was considered intimidation and suppression of artistic and political expression.

**o) 27 October 2025 Treason charges against influencer Jennifer Jovin**

The arrest and treason charges against a social media influencer over online content raised concerns about intimidation and criminalization of digital expression.

**p) 29 October 2025 Election period intimidation and violence against journalists**

During the general election journalists were detained, threatened, or prevented from reporting election related incidents, creating widespread fear among media practitioners.

**q) Early November 2025 Public statements calling for arrest of activist Mange Kimambi**

Public statements by senior government officials calling for the arrest of activist Mange Kimambi were widely viewed as intimidation of human rights activists abroad and online critics.

**r) 5 November 2025 Ban of Ney wa Mitego song “Amkeni”**

The National Arts Council of Tanzania (BASATA) banned the song “Amkeni” by musician Ney wa Mitego due to its political content and criticism of government leadership and policies. Authorities stated that the song was inciteful and could create public unrest and undermine national unity. The song was prohibited from being played on radio, television, and public performances.



s) **On 12–13 November 2025, Senior Advocate Mpale Kaba Mpoki summoned by the Police**

Senior Advocate Mpale Kaba Mpoki and Tanganyika Law Society President Boniface Mwabukusi were summoned and questioned by police in Dar es Salaam over allegations of mobilising demonstrations planned for December 2025. Although no charges were filed, the incident was widely viewed as intimidation targeting members of the legal profession and Bar leadership involved in public interest and human rights matters.

t) **21 November 2025 Clemence Mwandambo**

The arrest and detention of online content creator Clemence Mwandambo raised concerns about intimidation and criminalization of online expression.

### **3.3.4 Digital Repression and Internet Shutdown**

Digital repression refers to the use of internet controls, surveillance, digital laws, platform blocking, internet shutdowns, and online censorship to restrict freedom of expression, access to information, and civic engagement in digital spaces. Digital repression significantly increased in Tanzania during 2025, particularly in the period leading up to, during, and after the general elections. These measures targeted online platforms, social media communication, and internet access, affecting journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, activists, political actors, and ordinary citizens who relied on digital platforms to communicate, share information, and participate in public discourse.

On 5 May 2025, the Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology announced that the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) had closed a total of 80,171 blogs, websites, and online platforms as of 31 March 2025 for allegedly publishing content considered contrary to national laws, regulations, norms, and traditions.

On 6 October 2025, social media platforms experienced throttling and reduced internet speeds, particularly affecting live streaming and real time communication. Later, between 29 October and 5 November 2025, Tanzania experienced a nationwide internet shutdown and major disruption of internet services during the general election period and vote tallying process. The internet blackout severely limited communication, media reporting, and information sharing across the country and prevented journalists, civil society organizations, election observers, and citizens from documenting and reporting election related violence, arrests, and other human rights violations.



### 3.3.5 Land and Environmental Defenders Violations

Land and environmental defenders, particularly pastoralist communities and land rights activists, continued to face violations during 2025 in the context of land conflicts, conservation policies, and large-scale land use decisions. Reported violations included forced evictions, confiscation of livestock, arrests, and criminal charges linked to land use and conservation laws. These actions disproportionately affected pastoralist and rural communities whose livelihoods depend on communal land and grazing areas, and raised serious concerns regarding land rights, forced displacement, and the protection of community land under Tanzanian law.

Between 10 and 12 March 2025, a fact-finding mission conducted by Watetezi TV in Bombo Village, Kilindi District, Tanga Region found that approximately 2,600 villagers were forcibly evicted from their land without fair compensation or adequate consultation<sup>7</sup>. The evictions disrupted livelihoods, destroyed farms and settlements, and displaced families, raising concerns regarding violations of land rights and protections provided under the Land Act, Cap. 113 [R.E. 2023], the Village Land Act, Cap. 114 [R.E. 2023], the Land Acquisition Act, Cap. 118 [R.E. 2023], and constitutional protections relating to the right to property under Article 24 of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977. The evictions were reported to have been carried out without adequate notice, consultation, or compensation, contrary to legal requirements governing village land and compulsory acquisition.


Further, the Government Notice No. 600 of 2025 issued under the Local Government (District Authorities) Act, Cap. 287 amended administrative boundaries by abolishing wards, villages, and hamlets in Tanganyika, Nsimbo, and Kaliua Districts. According to the Government Notice, the order abolished 3 wards, 9 villages, and more than 60 hamlets in Tanganyika District; 10 wards, 24 villages, and more than 100 hamlets in Nsimbo District Council; and 4 wards, 8 villages, and more than 30 hamlets in Kaliua District. The deletion of these administrative areas had significant implications on village land status, land administration, and community land rights, and contributed to displacement and relocation of residents in the affected areas.

### 3.3.6 Strategic Litigation and Public Interest Cases

Human rights defenders and public interest lawyers continued to use strategic litigation during 2025 to challenge restrictive laws, unlawful government actions, enforced disappearances, land and environmental decisions, and limitations on access to justice. Strategic litigation remained an important tool for promoting

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<sup>7</sup> Fact Finding Mission Report by Watetezi TV 2025 available at *Nyumba Za Wananchi Hawa Zateketezwa Kwa Moto, Waondolewa Kwa Nguvu, Walala Nje Kwenye Maturubai*



constitutionalism, accountability, digital rights, land rights, and protection of civic space. In 2025 THRDC provided legal and technical support in 9 strategic public interest and constitutional cases before national courts and regional courts. Below is the list of cases

- a) **Onesmo Olungurumwa v. Attorney General (Civil Appeal No. 134 of 2022)**. The Court of Appeal delivered a landmark judgment on 13 June 2025 declaring several provisions of the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Act, 2020 unconstitutional for restricting public interest litigation and access to justice.
- b) **Adv. Onesmo Olungurumwa v. Attorney General (Miscellaneous Civil Cause No. 36 of 2019)**. A constitutional challenge relating to committal proceedings under the Criminal Procedure Act. The case was dismissed on 15 May 2025 on the ground of res judicata.
- c) **Urafiki General Store Zanzibar v. Attorney General and Director General, Zanzibar Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Authority (ZAECA) (Constitutional Petition No. 04 of 2024)** The case challenged legal provisions allowing freezing of bank accounts without time limits or timely court review.
- d) **Sije Emmanuel Mbugi v. Inspector General of Police and Others (Miscellaneous Criminal Application No. 14538 of 2025, High Court of Tanzania, Mbeya Sub-Registry)**. A habeas corpus application filed following the abduction and disappearance of Mdude Nyagali. The High Court dismissed the application on 9 July 2025 due to insufficient evidence linking the respondents to the alleged detention.
- e) **Deusdedith Soka, Jacob Mlay, and Frank Mbise (Miscellaneous Criminal Application No. 23998 of 2024, High Court of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam)**. THRDC continued follow-up in 2025, including writing to the Inspector General of Police seeking implementation of court directives and investigation into their disappearance.
- f) **Paul Emmanuel Kilasa Kisabo v. Attorney General (Civil Appeal No. 330 of 2023, Court of Appeal of Tanzania)**. A constitutional appeal challenging provisions relating to the removal of the Chief Justice and raising issues concerning judicial independence and separation of powers. The appeal remained pending during 2025.



- g) **Grace Naimadu Ngorisha v. Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism and the Attorney General of the United Republic of Tanzania (Reference before the East African Court of Justice)**. The case challenges the legality and procedure followed in the declaration of the Pololeti Game Controlled Area affecting community land rights and livelihoods.
- h) **Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), Tanganyika Law Society (TLS), Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), and Centre for Strategic Litigation (CSL) v. Attorney General of the United Republic of Tanzania (East African Court of Justice Reference No. 25 of 2020)**. The reference challenged amendments restricting public interest litigation and access to constitutional justice in Tanzania.
- i) **Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), Tanganyika Law Society (TLS), Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), and Centre for Strategic Litigation (CSL) v. Attorney General of the United Republic of Tanzania (East African Court of Justice Reference No. 27 of 2020)**. The reference challenged provisions of the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act, 2020 that restricted public interest litigation and accountability of public officials.

### **3.3.7 Cases Against Human Rights Defenders**

Criminal charges continued to be used against activists, journalists, political actors, lawyers, religious leaders, and online influencers during 2025. The charges included treason, publication of false information, cybercrime offences, unlawful assembly, operating online media without licences, and other criminal allegations. The use of criminal law in these cases raised concerns regarding the criminalization of human rights work, freedom of expression, political participation, media work, and civic activism.

During 2025, a total of 1,343 human rights defenders at risk received direct legal support from the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), including 1,029 male and 315 female human rights defenders. Among these, 1,256 human rights defenders were released after winning cases in court, after prosecution failed to proceed with cases, after charges were withdrawn, or after legal intervention resulted in their release from detention. However, over 80 criminal cases against human rights defenders were ongoing by February 2026. The cases demonstrate the continued use of arrests, prosecutions, and criminal proceedings against human rights defenders and civic actors.



Below are some of the key cases documented and supported by THRDC as specific cases against human rights defenders in 2025:

**a) 10<sup>th</sup> January 2025 , the Case of Dr. Wilbrod Slaa**

Dr. Wilbrod Slaa was arrested and charged with publication of false information under the Cybercrimes Act. The case proceeded before the Resident Magistrates' Court and later involved proceedings at the High Court and Court of Appeal concerning bail and procedural matters. On 27 February 2025, the Director of Public Prosecutions withdrew the charges and the case was withdrawn after several weeks in detention.

**b) 24th January 2025 Arbitrary Arrest and Detention of Advocate Valerian Qamara**

Advocate Valerian Qamara was arrested in Arusha in connection with an alleged armed robbery case described as fabricated. He was denied bail and later released unconditionally on 26 January 2025 without charges.

**c) 27th January 2025 Obstruction of Journalists Covering CHADEMA Press Conference**

Police officers in Dar es Salaam prevented more than 10 journalists from covering a press conference organized by Mr. John Mnyika at the CHADEMA headquarters. Journalists were blocked from entering the venue without lawful justification, effectively obstructing media work and limiting public access to information.

**d) 24<sup>th</sup> February 2025 Arrest of Joseph Paul Kaheza (NETO)**

Joseph Paul Kaheza, a human rights defender and activist advocating for the rights of non-employed teachers under the Non-Employed Teachers Organisation (NETO), was arrested in connection with his advocacy activities. He was detained by police and later released without formal charges after legal intervention.

**e) 26<sup>th</sup> February 2025 Arrest of Edger Mkinga (NETO)**

Edger Mkinga, also a human rights defender and secretary general of the Non-Employed Teachers Organisation (NETO), was arrested in connection with his advocacy activities of the organization. He was detained and later released without formal charges after intervention.

**f) 9th April 2025 Treason and Cybercrime Cases of Adv. Tundu Antiphas Lissu**

Adv. Tundu Lissu was arrested and charged with publication of false information under the Cybercrimes Act and treason under the Penal Code. He was detained



at Keko Remand Prison and later transferred to Ukonga Maximum Security Prison, where he faced restrictions on access to legal counsel and delays in court proceedings.

**g) 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025 Arrest and Harassment of Journalists Outside Kisutu Court**

Journalists were arrested, assaulted, and harassed by police officers outside the Kisutu Resident Magistrates' Court in Dar es Salaam while covering court proceedings in the case involving Adv. Tundu Lissu. Journalists were prevented from documenting the events and some were forced to delete photographs and videos. Among those arrested was journalist Hilda Newton, who was detained overnight at Central Police Station before being released without charges. Other journalists affected included Francis Simba of Mwanzo TV and Grace Khuni of Global TV.

**h) 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025 Arrest and Detention of Advocate Fredrick Msaki**

Arrested and detained for three days at Oysterbay Police Station without being formally charged and later released unconditionally following legal intervention.

**i) 18<sup>th</sup> May 2025 Arrest and Detention of Advocates Martha Karua, Gloria Kimani and Lyn Ngugi**

They were arrested and detained at Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam upon arrival in Tanzania, where they had travelled to observe court proceedings in the case involving Advocate Tundu Lissu. The advocates were held for several hours and later deported.

**j) 26<sup>th</sup> May 2025 The Case of Journalist Francis Godwin**


The case against him was dismissed due to lack of jurisdiction after he had been charged following investigative reporting on alleged corruption.

**k) 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025 The Case of Peter Katulanda Xavery and Happymasia Masali Konde**

The High Court quashed their conviction and ordered their release after finding that the prosecution failed to prove the case beyond reasonable doubt.

**l) 20<sup>th</sup> June 2025 The Case of Wachokonozi Podcast Founders, Mr. Joseph Mrindoko and Jackson Kabalo**

Arrested in Arumeru District, Arusha Region. Their equipment was confiscated and access to lawyers and family was initially denied. They were charged with



cybercrime offences. The case was withdrawn on 21 July 2025 but they were immediately rearrested and charged again. The case remained ongoing.

**m) 27th June 2025 Conviction of Journalist Obadia for Publication of False Information**

He was convicted under Section 16 of the Cybercrimes Act on publication of false information and sentenced to three years imprisonment or a fine of TZS 10 million.

**n) 29th June 2025 Arrest of 52 Believers of the Glory of Christ Church Tanzania**

Arrested while attempting to exercise their right to worship and later released without court proceedings after legal intervention.

**o) 4<sup>th</sup> August 2025 Conviction of Rev. Shaniel Sosoa**

Convicted under the Cybercrimes Act for cyberbullying and publication of false information and later paid a fine of TZS 5 million.

**p) 5<sup>th</sup> August 2025 Arrest and Detention of Advocate Kemilembe Dauson Barongo**

Advocate Kemilembe was arrested by officers of the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB) and detained at Oysterbay Police Station in Dar es Salaam. During her detention, her advocates were reportedly denied access to her despite her constitutional right to legal representation and access to counsel.

**q) 6th September 2025 Unlawful Detention of Ezekiel Mollel and Baraka Lucas (Online TV Journalists)**

Arrested and detained beyond 24 hours without being taken to court and later released unconditionally in Arusha.

**r) 15<sup>th</sup> September 2025 Arrest and Detention of Advocate Deogratias Mahinyila**

Advocate Deogratias Mahinyila was arrested at the High Court of Tanzania while performing his professional duties. The arrest raised concerns regarding the safety and independence of lawyers handling sensitive and public interest cases.



s) **24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September 2025 Arrest and Harassment of HRDs Innocent Paul Chuwe and Frida Mikoroti**

They were arrested, released on police bail, and later rearrested and detained without charges. After intervention, they were unconditionally released.

t) **29<sup>th</sup> September 2025 The Case of Bishop Maximilian Machumu Kadutu**

Bishop Maximilian Machumu Kadutu was acquitted by the Resident Magistrate Court in Singida in an incitement case that had been filed in July 2024. The case had attracted significant public attention and raised concerns regarding the use of criminal charges against political and religious leaders.

u) **15<sup>th</sup> October 2025 Four HRDs Arrested for Operating Online Television Without Licenses**

Japhet Alex Thobias, Joseph Augustine Mabwe, Tegemeo Zacharia Mwenegoha, and Elia Constantine Pius were arrested and charged at Kisumu Resident Magistrates' Court. The case was later resolved through plea bargaining and they were discharged.

v) **Defamation Case of Journalist Alloyce Nyanda**

In 2025, journalist Alloyce Nyanda of Sahara Media Group was ordered by the Mwanza High Court to pay TZS 2 billion in damages in a defamation case filed by a former Mwanza City Director. The decision was later overturned by the High Court on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2025, nullifying the compensation order. The case raised concerns about the use of defamation lawsuits to intimidate journalists.

w) **22<sup>nd</sup> October 2025 Arrest of Journalist Jumbe Ismail**


Journalist Jumbe Ismail of Channel Ten in Singida was detained by police while attempting to cover a campaign event for a presidential candidate. Police reportedly stopped him from accessing the campaign venue and detained him at Singida Central Police Station. He was later released without charges.

x) **29<sup>th</sup> October 2025 Arrest of Journalist Godfrey Thomas**

Journalist Godfrey Thomas from Ayo TV was arrested and detained by police for more than seven days without being taken to court. The arrest was linked to his media work during the election period and raised concerns regarding harassment of journalists and unlawful detention. He was charged for treason and later released after charges being withdrawn.

y) **4<sup>th</sup> November 2025 Arrest of Journalist Alphonse Kusaga**

Journalist Alphonse Kusaga of Kusaga TV was arrested by police in Arusha and



confiscated his working tools and later detained him for more than three days at Central Police Station. The arrest was linked to online content published on Kusaga TV and was considered harassment of an online journalist.

**z) 8<sup>th</sup> November 2025 Arrest and Prolonged Detention of Charles Hangaya**

Charles Hangaya the bodyguard to opposition leader Adv. Tundu Antiphos Lissu was arrested and detained for more than one month on undisclosed charges. He was held incommunicado for several weeks and denied timely access to lawyers and family members. He was later released on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025. The prolonged detention raised concerns regarding arbitrary denial suspects, incommunicado detention, and the use of criminal procedure to prolong detention and exert pressure on individuals associated with political actors and ongoing criminal proceedings.

**aa) 12<sup>th</sup> November 2025 Police Summoned and Interrogated Advocate Mpale Kaba Mpoki**

Senior Advocate Mpale Kaba Mpoki was summoned and questioned by police in Dar es Salaam regarding alleged involvement in mobilizing demonstrations scheduled for December 2025. He was questioned by police officers and later released without conditions or charges. The summons and interrogation of a senior advocate and member of the legal profession raised concerns about intimidation and pressure directed at lawyers involved in public interest matters.

**ab) 16<sup>th</sup> November 2025 The Case of Issa Mwamba Athumani**

He was given a conditional discharge and ordered to perform community service for publication of false information charges.

**ac) Documented arbitrary arrests of 2,045 individuals in connection with the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2025 general elections.**

THRDC provided legal support in collaboration with the Tanganyika Law Society, Legal and human Rights Centre

**ad) Republic v. Godlisten Malisa and Boniface Jacob**

Charged with publication of false information under the Cybercrimes Act since 2024; the case is pending at Kisutu Court in Dar es Salaam.

The criminal cases documented during 2025 demonstrate a pattern of arrests, prosecutions, convictions, and administrative actions targeting human rights defenders, journalists, activists, religious leaders, and online media operators.

Many of the cases were related to freedom of expression, digital rights, political participation, and civic activism. The use of criminal law, cybercrime legislation, and regulatory laws in these cases raises concerns about the criminalization of human rights work and the continuous shrinking civic space in Tanzania.

### 3.3.8 Challenges Facing Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders in Tanzania continued to face legal, institutional, financial, and security challenges that affected their ability to operate freely and effectively. The following were the key challenges identified during the reporting period



a) **Absence of a Legal Protection Framework for Human Rights Defenders**

Tanzania does not have a specific law or policy that recognises and protects human rights defenders. Unlike several African countries that have adopted HRD protection laws or policies, Tanzania lacks a formal protection mechanism, leaving HRDs without institutional recognition, protection measures, or state supported protection systems despite the risks associated with their work.

b) **Arbitrary Arrests and Detention**

Human rights defenders continued to face arbitrary arrests and detention linked to their work, particularly when engaging in advocacy, public interest litigation, or criticism of government policies. Such arrests undermine constitutional



freedoms, including freedom of movement and expression, and create fear among activists, journalists, and civil society actors.

**c) Restrictive Legal and Regulatory Framework**

Restrictive laws such as the Media Services Act, Cybercrimes Act, Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, and amendments to the Basic Rights and Duties Enforcement Act continue to limit freedom of expression, digital rights, media freedom, and public interest litigation, thereby restricting the work of human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

**d) Threats, Harassment and Intimidation**

Human rights defenders, including lawyers, journalists, religious leaders, and activists, continued to face threats, intimidation, and harassment due to their work. Incidents reported during 2025 included threats against Bishop Dr. Benson Bagonza, Advocate Boniface Mwabukusi, and Advocate Edward Heche, demonstrating a broader pattern of intimidation targeting individuals involved in governance and human rights advocacy.

**e) Criminalization of Human Rights Work**

Criminal charges such as publication of false information, cybercrime offences, unlawful assembly, and treason have been used against activists, journalists, and political actors. The use of criminal law against HRDs raises concerns about the misuse of the criminal justice system to silence dissent, restrict political participation, and intimidate critics and activists.

**f) Denial of Bail and Prolonged Pre-Trial Detention**

There have been recurring cases where individuals charged with bailable offences were denied bail and detained for extended periods. The case of Charles Hangaya, who was detained for more than one month despite a bailable offence, raised concerns about arbitrary denial of bail and abuse of criminal procedure to prolong detention.

**g) Restrictions on Media and Confiscation of Journalistic Equipment**

Journalists and media HRDs have faced obstruction, arrests, and confiscation of working tools such as cameras, phones, and laptops during arrests or investigations. In many cases, these tools are not returned, disrupting journalistic work and limiting independent reporting on governance and human rights issues. This affects the HRDs' right to work as constitutionally guaranteed.



**h) Forced Evictions and Displacement For Land and Environmental Defenders**

Pastoralists and land rights human rights defenders continue to face forced evictions, livestock confiscation, displacement, and criminal charges under conservation and land laws. Communities in Kilindi, Ngorongoro, Loliondo, Kisarawe, Kaliua, Katavi, and Mbarali reported land conflicts, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. Over 2,600 families suffered in Kilindi because of evictions with unfair compensation.


**i) Abductions and Enforced Disappearances**

Human rights defenders, activists, lawyers, journalists, and political actors have increasingly become victims of abductions and enforced disappearances in Tanzania. THRDC documented 42 incidents of abductions and enforced disappearances in 2025 alone. Between 2014 and 2024, more than 100 abduction cases were documented, yet many of these cases have not been effectively investigated and perpetrators have not been identified or prosecuted. Tanzania has also not ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The lack of effective investigations and accountability has created fear, insecurity, and self-censorship among human rights defenders and the general public.

**j) Election Related Restrictions and Digital Repression**

Periods of heightened political activity, particularly during the 2025 general elections, were associated with increased surveillance, arrests of activists, movement restrictions, internet shutdowns, and social media restrictions. Election laws and regulations governing the 2025 elections also imposed significant restrictions on civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and election observers, which affected civic participation, election monitoring, and documentation of human rights violations during the election period.

The Regulations for the Election of the President, Members of Parliament and Councillors, 2025 contained several provisions that restricted the work of election observers and civil society organisations. The Regulations granted the Electoral Commission wide discretionary powers to approve or reject applications for election observation without clear criteria or an obligation to provide reasons for rejection. This created uncertainty and increased the risk of exclusion of civil society organisations and independent observers from election observation processes, thereby limiting independent oversight and transparency in the electoral process.



The Regulations also restricted the observation period to the time specified in observer accreditation rather than allowing observation throughout the entire electoral process. This limited the ability of observers and civil society organisations to monitor critical stages such as voter registration, campaigns, pre-election environment, and post-election processes, thereby reducing the effectiveness of election observation and monitoring activities.

Furthermore, the Regulations prohibited election observers from speaking to the media, publishing reports, or making public statements during the election process before submitting their reports to the Electoral Commission. This restriction limited transparency and interfered with freedom of expression and the independence of election observers. In addition, the Regulations granted broad powers to the Electoral Commission to revoke observer accreditation, issue directives, and impose penalties without clear appeal procedures, creating a risk of abuse of administrative powers and intimidation of observers.

The Regulations also provided that observers who violated the regulations could have their accreditation revoked and be banned from future election observation, which amounted to excessive penalties that discouraged civil society participation in election observation. The requirement that observer reports be submitted to the Electoral Commission before being made public compromised the independence of observers and limited public access to independent election observation findings. Additionally, the Regulations did not allow political party agents and election observers access to polling stations in prisons and reform centres, which reduced transparency and accountability in voting processes within those facilities and raised concerns regarding the credibility and transparency of voting in such locations.

**k) Non Implementation of Court Decisions and Weak Rule of Law**

Human rights defenders face significant challenges due to the non implementation of court decisions, particularly in public interest and human rights cases. Several landmark judgments from the Court of Appeal of Tanzania, the East African Court of Justice, and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights have not been implemented by the Government. This discourages human rights defenders from using strategic litigation as a tool for reform because favourable judgments often do not lead to legal or policy changes in time. The failure to implement court decisions undermines constitutionalism, weakens the rule of law, and limits the effectiveness of legal advocacy by human rights defenders.



## **l) Concerns Regarding Judicial Independence**

Concerns regarding judicial independence and access to justice continue to affect the work of human rights defenders, particularly in politically sensitive cases involving unlawful detention and enforced disappearances. In several habeas corpus cases, courts have placed a heavy burden on applicants to prove that missing persons are in the custody of state authorities, which is often difficult in abduction cases. This has limited the effectiveness of habeas corpus as a tool for protecting victims of enforced disappearance.

For example, in *Deusdedith Soka, Jacob Mlay and Frank Mbise v Inspector General of Police and Others*<sup>8</sup>, the court required the applicants to prove that the victims were in police custody before issuing orders for their production. This created difficulties because the alleged perpetrators were believed to be security officers and the whereabouts of the victims were unknown.

Similarly, in *Sije Emmanuel Mbugi v Inspector General of Police and Others*<sup>9</sup> relating to the disappearance of Mdude Nyagali, the court dismissed the habeas corpus application after finding insufficient evidence that the respondents were holding the victim, despite allegations that the abductors identified themselves as police officers.

In *Hon. Humphrey H. Polepole v Inspector General of Police and Others*<sup>10</sup>, the respondents denied involvement and argued that the allegations were speculative and unsupported by evidence. The case demonstrated the difficulty applicants face in proving unlawful detention where state authorities deny custody.

These cases demonstrate that the burden of proof placed on applicants in habeas corpus and disappearance cases makes it difficult for victims and human rights defenders to obtain court orders, thereby weakening legal protection mechanisms in cases of abduction and enforced disappearance.

## **m) Financial Constraints and Donor Funding Cuts**


Human rights defenders and civil society organisations face serious financial constraints that limit their ability to conduct human rights monitoring, provide

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<sup>8</sup> *Deusdedith Soka & 2 Others v. Inspector General of Police & 6 Others* (Misc. Criminal Application No. 23998 of 2024) [2024] TZHC 7625 (28 August 2024)

<sup>9</sup> *Sije Emmanuel Mbugi vs Inspector General of Police (IGP) and Five Others* (Miscellaneous Criminal Application No. 14538 of 2025) [2025] TZHC 3946 (9 July 2025)

<sup>10</sup> *Hon. Humphrey H. Polepole vs The Inspector General of Police & 4 Others* (Criminal Application No. 24514 of 2025) [2025] TZHC 6631 (24 October 2025)



legal aid, conduct advocacy, and implement protection programmes for defenders at risk. Many organisations depend on donor funding, and changes in donor priorities away from human rights governance programmes toward economic development and service delivery have reduced funding available for human rights work. Limited funding has affected documentation of human rights violations, legal representation, civic education, and protection support for human rights defenders.

The financial challenges were further exacerbated in 2025 by the suspension and reduction of United States foreign aid, including programmes previously funded through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). According to report on The Impact Of United States Funding Changes On Tanzania Civil Society Organizations<sup>11</sup> published by the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), the funding cuts affected several civil society organisations working on human rights, legal aid, health programmes, civic participation, and community empowerment. Some organisations were forced to reduce staff, suspend projects, and close programmes due to funding shortages. The reduction in funding weakened institutional capacity of civil society organisations and reduced support systems available for human rights defenders, increasing their vulnerability and limiting their ability to respond to human rights violations.

### **3.4 The Role of State Institutions (Police, DPP, Judiciary)**

State institutions play a central role in the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs), enforcement of law, and promotion of rule of law in Tanzania. The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977 guarantees fundamental rights including the right to life (Article 14), right to personal liberty (Article 15), equality before the law (Article 13), right to a fair hearing (Article 13(6)), freedom of expression (Article 18), freedom of association (Article 20), and the right to seek redress before courts of law (Article 26(2)). These constitutional guarantees place responsibility on state institutions, particularly the Tanzania Police Force, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), and the Judiciary, to protect human rights and ensure accountability and access to justice.

The Criminal Justice Reform Commission established in 2023 identified several systemic challenges affecting the criminal justice system including abuse of arrest powers, delays in investigations and prosecution, prolonged pre-trial detention, poor

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11\_ The Impact Of United States Funding Changes On Tanzania Civil Society Organizations. "Lesson Learnt and Coping Mechanisms", 2025 Available at <https://www.thrdc.or.tz/reportsfiles/Impact%20of%20USAID%20Grant%20Suspension%20to%20CSOs.pdf>



coordination between criminal justice institutions, and delays in court proceedings.<sup>12</sup> These challenges directly affect access to justice and the protection of human rights defenders. Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) actively participated in the criminal justice reform process and submitted detailed recommendations aimed at improving accountability, human rights protection, and access to justice within criminal justice institutions.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.4.1 The Tanzania Police Force**

The Tanzania Police Force is established under the Police Force and Auxiliary Services Act, and is responsible for maintaining law and order, preventing and detecting crime, and conducting criminal investigations. The Police General Orders regulate police conduct including arrest procedures, detention, interrogation, and use of force. The police therefore play a critical role in protecting the constitutional rights to personal liberty, security of person, and protection from arbitrary arrest.

The Criminal Justice Reform Commission identified several challenges within the police including excessive use of force during arrest and interrogation, torture and ill-treatment of suspects during investigations, delays in investigations, failure to act on crime reports, and suspects not being taken to court within the required time. The Commission also noted that multiple institutions have arrest powers, which has led to abuse of arrest powers and unlawful detention of suspects. The Commission further observed that the existence of many institutions conducting criminal investigations leads to duplication of functions, poor coordination, and weak accountability in criminal investigations.


These challenges have direct implications for human rights defenders, journalists, activists, and political actors who are frequently subjected to arrest, detention, and criminal investigations in the course of their work. Failure to properly investigate crimes such as threats, assaults, and abductions also affects protection of human rights defenders and contributes to impunity.

THRDC recommended several reforms to improve police accountability and human rights protection, including amendment of laws to require completion of investigations before arrest, establishment of independent complaints mechanisms in police stations, installation of modern technology for recording cautioned statements, strengthening legal aid services at police stations, improving detention conditions,

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12\_Ripoti ya Tume ya Kuangalia Jinsi ya Kuboresha Taasisi za Haki Jinai Nchini, Julai 2023.

13 Recommendations on Reformation of the Criminal Justice System in Tanzania By The Members of the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition and Human Rights Advocates in Tanzania Presented to the Criminal Justice Reform Committee on 20/02/2023



and introducing human rights training for police officers, changing name from police force to police service. THRDC also recommended that police officers who commit torture, unlawful detention, or abuse of power should be held criminally responsible under the law.

### **3.4.2 The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP)**

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is established under Article 59B of the Constitution and governed by the National Prosecutions Service Act. The DPP is responsible for instituting, conducting, taking over, and discontinuing criminal proceedings and is required to exercise these powers independently and in the interest of justice.

The Criminal Justice Reform Commission identified challenges in the prosecution system including delays in reviewing investigation files, insufficient prosecutors, inadequate resources, and incomplete separation between investigation and prosecution functions. The Commission noted that delays in prosecution contribute to prolonged pre-trial detention, case backlog, and delays in justice delivery. The Commission recommended strengthening the National Prosecutions Service through increased staffing, improved coordination with investigators, and full separation between investigation and prosecution functions.

The performance of the prosecution system has significant implications for human rights defenders because decisions to charge, withdraw cases, or continue prosecution directly affect the rights to liberty, fair trial, and access to justice.

THRDC recommended reforms including requiring the DPP to provide reasons when entering nolle prosequi or withdrawing charges, restricting reinstatement of charges on the same facts without court approval, strengthening supervision of public prosecutors, allowing private prosecution in certain cases where public prosecutors fail to act, and improving coordination between investigators and prosecutors to ensure timely prosecution of cases. These reforms aim to prevent abuse of prosecutorial powers and strengthen accountability in criminal justice processes.

### **3.4.3 The Judiciary of Tanzania**

The Judiciary of Tanzania is established under Chapter Five of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania. Article 107A provides that judicial authority shall be exercised by courts on behalf of the people and shall be guided by the principles of impartiality, independence, and justice without technicalities. Article 107B guarantees the independence of the judiciary and requires courts to dispense justice without being influenced by any person or authority.



The Judiciary plays a critical role in protecting human rights defenders through bail decisions, habeas corpus applications, constitutional petitions, judicial review, and public interest litigation. Courts are responsible for ensuring that arrests, detention, and prosecutions comply with the Constitution and the law.

The Criminal Justice Reform Commission identified several challenges affecting the Judiciary including delays in court proceedings, case backlog, inadequate number of judges and magistrates, delays in High Court sessions, and prolonged pre-trial detention due to slow investigation and prosecution processes. The Commission recommended reforms including increasing the number of judicial officers, improving case management systems, expanding the use of technology in courts, and reforming committal proceedings to reduce delays in criminal trials.

Delays in court proceedings, denial of bail, and heavy evidentiary burdens in cases involving unlawful detention and enforced disappearances have affected access to justice for human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations.

THRDC had recommended several judicial reforms including establishing a Human Rights and Constitutional Court Division, reforming bail laws to ensure courts have full discretion to grant bail, improving case management systems to reduce delays, ensuring judicial independence in appointment and disciplinary processes, strengthening judicial ethics and accountability mechanisms, and decentralizing constitutional and human rights cases to allow access to justice outside Dar es Salaam.

#### **3.4.4 Impact on Access to Justice and Accountability**

The effectiveness, independence, and accountability of the Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the Judiciary directly affect the protection of human rights defenders and the rule of law in Tanzania. Challenges such as arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention, delays in prosecution and court proceedings, failure to investigate human rights violations, and non-implementation of court decisions weaken protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and reduce public confidence in state institutions.

The participation of Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition in the Criminal Justice Reform process and its recommendations on police reforms, prosecution reforms, and judicial reforms demonstrate the important role of civil society in promoting rule of law, accountability, and protection of human rights defenders in Tanzania.



### **3.5 Conclusion**

The situation of human rights defenders in Tanzania in 2025 was characterized by increasing restrictions on civic space, widespread reports of abductions and enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, digital repression, media restrictions, threats and intimidation, and financial challenges affecting civil society organizations.

The legal, practical and regulatory framework continues to impose significant restrictions on civic engagement and digital expression, while the failure to investigate violations and hold perpetrators accountable has contributed to a climate of impunity.

The combination of restrictive laws, political pressure, digital repression, abductions, and limited accountability created a challenging and high risk environment for human rights defenders in Tanzania. Strengthening legal protection, ensuring accountability for violations, reforming restrictive laws, and creating an enabling environment for civic engagement remain essential for the protection of human rights defenders and the promotion of democratic governance and rule of law in Tanzania.

# THE STATE OF CIVIC SPACE IN TANZANIA

## 4.1 Introduction

The state of civic space in Tanzania in 2025 was shaped significantly by the political environment surrounding the 2025 General Elections, the regulatory framework governing civil society and media, digital governance policies, and the conduct of state institutions responsible for law enforcement and communication regulation. Civic space encompasses the environment in which individuals and groups are able to exercise fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and participation in public affairs.

Throughout 2025, civic space in Tanzania experienced increased restrictions, particularly during the electoral period and its aftermath. Restrictions were observed in physical civic space, digital civic space, media operations, political participation, and civil society operations. Incidents documented during the year included internet shutdowns, arrests of journalists and human rights defenders, restrictions on political gatherings, media content regulation, and surveillance and control of online communication platforms. These developments collectively contributed to a narrowing of civic space and increased risks for civic actors, including journalists, civil society organizations, political actors, and human rights defenders.

Evidence from digital governance monitoring reports indicates that while Tanzania continued to expand digital infrastructure and internet access, digital civic freedoms declined, especially during politically sensitive periods such as elections. The digital space increasingly became a central arena for political communication, activism, and public debate, but also a site of regulation, surveillance, and restrictions.

## 4.2 Legal and Regulatory Environment for Civic Space

The legal and regulatory environment governing civic space in Tanzania is shaped by the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, various statutory laws, regulations, subsidiary legislation, and administrative guidelines that regulate media, civil society



organizations, political parties, public assemblies, and digital communication platforms. While the legal framework provides for fundamental rights and freedoms, the regulatory environment also contains provisions that allow significant state oversight and control over civic actors, media operations, and online communication.

#### 4.2.1 Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977 provides the primary legal foundation for civic space in Tanzania and guarantees a range of fundamental rights and freedoms that are essential for civic engagement, democratic participation, and the work of civil society organizations, media, and human rights defenders. The Bill of Rights under the constitution guarantees civil and political rights that underpin freedom of expression, association, assembly, and participation in public affairs.

Constitutional provision	Rights and freedoms guaranteed
<b>Article 5</b>	Provides for the right of citizens to vote and to be elected to public office, however this right is not enforceable under the Bill of Rights
<b>Article 8</b>	Establishes the fundamental principles of state governance, including that <i>sovereignty resides in the people</i> , the government shall be accountable to the people, and that the people shall participate in governance through elected representatives and democratic processes.
<b>Article 12 and 13</b>	Guarantee equality before the law and prohibit discrimination
<b>Article 15</b>	Guarantees the right to personal freedom and protection from arbitrary arrest and detention
<b>Article 16</b>	Guarantees the right to privacy and personal security, including respect for a person's residence and private communications.
<b>Article 18</b>	Provides for the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to seek, receive, and disseminate information regardless of national boundaries, and the right to be informed at all times about important events affecting the life and activities of the people and issues of importance to society



<b>Article 20</b>	Provides that every person has the right to freely and voluntarily associate with others, including the right to form and join organizations or associations for purposes of preserving or furthering their beliefs or interests.
<b>Article 21</b>	Guarantees the right of every citizen to participate in public affairs, either directly or through freely chosen representatives. This includes the right to participate in governance, elections, and public decision making processes.
<b>Article 22 and 24</b>	Guarantees the right to work and to own property. While these rights are primarily economic in nature, they contribute to the broader environment in which individuals and civil society organizations operate.
<b>Article 26</b>	Forms the constitutional basis for public interest litigation. Individuals and organizations are given the legal basis to approach the courts to challenge violations of the Constitution, abuse of power, and unlawful actions by public authorities.
<b>Article 29</b>	Provides that every person has the right to enjoy fundamental human rights and freedoms, subject to respect for the Constitution, the laws of the land, and the rights and freedoms of other persons.
<b>Article 30(3)</b>	Allows for the restriction of rights and freedoms through legislation where such limitations are necessary in the public interest, including for reasons of national security, public safety, public order, morality, or public health. This limitation clause has significant implications for civic space because it provides the legal basis for many laws and regulations that restrict freedom of expression, assembly, association, media freedom, and digital rights.

#### 4.2.2 Statutory Laws Governing Civic Space

Several laws directly regulate civic space in Tanzania, particularly in relation to civil society organizations, media, digital communication, political activities, and public assemblies. Key laws include:



Principal legislation	Relevancy to civic space
<b>The Non-Governmental Organizations Act, 2002</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Governs registration, coordination, and operations of NGOs.</li> <li>· Provides powers to the Registrar of NGOs to suspend or deregister NGOs.</li> <li>· Requires NGOs to submit reports and comply with national priorities and regulations.</li> </ul>
<b>The Societies Act</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Governs registration of associations</li> <li>· Gives the Registrar powers to refuse or cancel registration of societies.</li> </ul>
<b>The Political Parties Act</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Governs registration and regulation of political parties.</li> <li>· Regulates political meetings, rallies, and political activities.</li> <li>· Gives powers to the Registrar of Political Parties to supervise party operations.</li> </ul>
<b>The Media Services Act, 2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Regulates media operations, journalists accreditation, and media content.</li> <li>· Establishes the Journalists Accreditation Board.</li> <li>· Provides powers to suspend or ban media outlets and journalists.</li> </ul>
<b>The Electronic and Postal Communications Act (EPOCA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Governs electronic communications, online content, and telecommunications.</li> <li>· Provides powers to regulate online content, broadcasting, and digital platforms.</li> </ul>
<b>The Cybercrimes Act, 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Criminalizes publication of false information, online impersonation, cyber harassment, and unauthorized access.</li> <li>· Frequently used in cases involving online speech and digital expression.</li> </ul>



<p><b>The Personal Data Protection Act</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Regulates collection, processing, and storage of personal data.</li> <li>· Has implications for digital rights, surveillance, and data governance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Public Order Act</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Governs public assemblies, demonstrations, and public meetings.</li> <li>· Requires permits for public gatherings and gives police powers to regulate assemblies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The National Security Act</b></p>	<p>Provides broad powers related to national security and information disclosure.</p>
<p><b>The Film and Stage Plays Act</b></p>	<p>Regulates artistic content, films, and stage performances.</p>
<p><b>The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority Act</b></p>	<p>Establishes the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) and gives it regulatory powers over communications, broadcasting, and online content.</p>
<p><b>The Access to Information Act, 2016</b></p>	<p>Provides for the right of citizens to access information held by public authorities, subject to certain limitations. This law is important for transparency, accountability, media work, research, and civic engagement.</p>
<p><b>The Police Force and Auxiliary Services Act</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Regulates the powers, duties, and functions of the police force in maintaining law and order, public safety, and security.</li> <li>· Regulates public assemblies, meetings, and processions by requiring prior written notification to the police not less than forty-eight hours before conducting a public rally or procession.</li> <li>· Gives the police powers to regulate the conduct of assemblies and processions, issue stop orders, disperse assemblies, and declare assemblies unlawful where legal requirements are not complied with.</li> </ul>



<b>The Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors' Elections Act, No. 1 of 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Regulates the conduct of presidential, parliamentary, and councillors' elections, including nomination, campaigns, polling, and declaration of results.</li><li>· Provides for election campaigns, political meetings, election observation, and election offences and penalties.</li></ul>
<b>The Independent National Elections Act, No. 2 of 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Establishes the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and regulates the administration and management of elections.</li><li>· Provides for voter registration, nomination processes, supervision of elections, and announcement of election results.</li><li>· Empowers the Commission to issue regulations, guidelines, and procedures governing election observation, voter education, and media participation in elections.</li></ul>
<b>The Zanzibar Broadcasting Services Act</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Regulates broadcasting services in Zanzibar, including radio, television, and online broadcasting services.</li><li>· Establishes the Zanzibar Broadcasting Commission responsible for licensing and regulation of broadcasting services and content.</li><li>· Provides powers to regulate broadcasting content, issue warnings, suspend, or revoke broadcasting licenses, affecting media freedom and access to information.</li></ul>

### 4.2.3 Regulations and Subsidiary Legislation

In addition to principal legislation, several regulations and subsidiary laws significantly affect civic space in Tanzania, particularly in relation to digital rights, media freedom, civil society operations, political activities, and online expression. These regulations



provide detailed procedures, compliance requirements, licensing conditions, content regulation standards, accreditation procedures, and operational guidelines that directly affect the work of civil society organizations, media houses, journalists, online content creators, political parties, and election observers.

These include *the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, the Electronic and Postal Communications (Broadcasting) Regulations, the Electronic and Postal Communications (Radio and Television Broadcasting Content) Regulations, the Electronic and Postal Communications (Licensing) Regulations, the Electronic and Postal Communications (Consumer Protection) Regulations, the Electronic Transactions Regulations, the Media Services Regulations, the Journalists Accreditation Regulations, the Political Parties Regulations, the Non-Governmental Organizations Regulations and Guidelines, the Public Assembly and Demonstrations Procedures issued under the Public Order Act, the Personal Data Protection Regulations and Guidelines, and the Regulations for the Election of the President, Members of Parliament and Councillors, 2025.*


### **4.3 Freedom of Expression**

#### **a) Freedom of Expression in Physical Civic Space**

Freedom of expression in Tanzania in 2025 was affected by arrests, prosecutions, intimidation, administrative sanctions, and regulatory actions against journalists, media houses, online content creators, activists, political actors, and artists. The election period in particular was associated with increased restrictions on media coverage, arrests of journalists, regulatory directives on media content, and criminal cases related to political expression and online content. These developments created an environment in which journalists, activists, and media houses operated under fear of arrest, suspension, or regulatory sanctions.

THRDC documented 209 incidents affecting freedom of expression in 2025. These included arrests and prosecutions of online platform operators under cybercrime and electronic communications laws, suspension and banning of media platforms and online media, arrest and detention of journalists while covering political events, restrictions on journalists covering election related incidents, regulatory directives on content to be aired by media houses, banning of protest songs and politically sensitive artistic content, and criminal charges related to political speech, satire, and online content.

In June and July 2025, owners of the Wachokonozi online platform were charged with publishing false information under the Cybercrimes Act and operating an online platform without a license under the Electronic and Postal Communications Act. In September 2025, journalists Ezekial Mollel of Manara TV and Baraka Lucas of



Jambo TV were detained in Arusha for allegedly operating online television platforms without registration under the Online Content Regulations. During the same period, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority suspended the online platform JamiiAfrica for 90 days on allegations of publishing misleading content and content considered defamatory and harmful to national unity.

Journalists were also subjected to physical violence, arrests, and intimidation while performing their duties. Journalist Marco Kilo of East Africa Television was assaulted and detained while reporting in Dar es Salaam. During the election period in October 2025, several journalists were prevented from covering campaign events, detained by police, or exposed to violence while covering demonstrations and election related events. Journalists from Azam Media, ITV, Mwananchi, Watetezi TV, Crown TV, Global TV, and other media houses were affected by election related violence and restrictions while covering events.

The election period was particularly dangerous for journalists as some were injured or shot during election related violence. THRDC documented incidents of three journalists who were killed during the 2025 general election period. These are:

- a) Master Tindwa (Clouds Media)
- b) Kelvin Lameck Mwakangondya (Baraka FM)
- c) Maneno Saranyika (former Mtanzania Newspaper)

In Zanzibar, the Zanzibar Broadcasting Commission issued warnings to 11 online media platforms, including TIFU Online TV, Marhaba Online TV, Vuga Online TV, Busati Online TV, Kasusi Online TV, Digital Online TV, Leaders Online TV, Zanzibar Yetu Online TV, Mawengi Online TV, Jimbi Online TV, and MU Online TV for allegedly operating in violation of broadcasting regulations. This demonstrated regulatory pressure on online media platforms in Zanzibar.

In addition to journalists, artists and online influencers were also affected by restrictions on freedom of expression. The National Arts Council banned the protest song "*Teremsha Bunduki*" by Roma Mkatoliki, and songs by artist Ney wa Mitego were restricted from being played on radio and television on grounds that they could incite public unrest. These actions demonstrate regulation of artistic expression and political satire through administrative measures and content control.

## **b) Freedom of Expression in Digital Civic Space**

Digital civic space was one of the most affected areas in 2025, particularly during the election period. Restrictions on digital rights included blocking of social media platforms, internet shutdowns, throttling of internet services, arrests related to online speech, digital surveillance, online harassment, and content regulation.



One of the major digital rights incidents documented in 2025 was the blocking of access to the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) beginning in May 2025. Users reported that access to the platform was restricted and could only be accessed through Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), indicating platform-level blocking and censorship.

During the general election period from 29 October to early November 2025, Tanzania experienced a nationwide internet shutdown that affected communication, access to information, media reporting, business operations, and civic engagement across the country. The shutdown lasted several days during vote tallying and post-election developments and resulted in significant economic losses and disruption of communication and information access.

In addition to the internet shutdown, social media throttling was reported in October 2025, particularly affecting live streaming services such as Instagram Live and TikTok Live, which were commonly used for real time election reporting and monitoring. The throttling limited bandwidth and reduced the ability of citizens, journalists, and civil society organizations to share real-time information during the election period.

On 5 May 2025, the Ministry of Information, Communication and Information Technology stated that the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority had closed a total of 80,171 blogs, websites, and online platforms as of 31 March 2025 for allegedly publishing content considered contrary to national laws, regulations, norms, and traditions. This demonstrates the scale of administrative regulation and control of online content and digital platforms in Tanzania.

The digital environment in 2025 also saw increased online harassment, particularly targeting political actors, activists, and women in politics. Digital governance monitoring reports documented numerous incidents of online harassment, digital intimidation, and surveillance during the election period.

## 4.4 Freedom of Expression Incidents in 2025



## 4.5 Freedom of Association and Assembly

Freedom of association and freedom of assembly are fundamental civic freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, which provide for the right of individuals to form organizations, participate in political parties, join associations, and assemble peacefully for meetings, demonstrations, and public participation. These rights are essential for democratic governance, civic engagement, political participation, and the functioning of civil society organizations.

In 2025, freedom of association and assembly in Tanzania was affected by legal and regulatory frameworks, administrative procedures, political developments, law enforcement practices, and election related restrictions. Civil society organizations, political parties, activists, and citizens faced regulatory compliance requirements, monitoring, restrictions on activities, and police control of public gatherings, particularly during the election period.

Civic space environment in Tanzania continued to face restrictions affecting political opposition, civil society organizations, journalists, and activists, particularly in the context of the 2025 general elections and related political activities. In 2025 there



was political repression, restrictions on opposition activities, arrests of political actors, and restrictions on protests and demonstrations.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4.5.1 Freedom of Association**

Freedom of association in Tanzania in 2025 was affected by regulatory requirements, administrative decisions, political developments, arrests of political actors, and legal disputes relating to electoral participation and political party activities. The year was characterized by increasing tensions between political parties, regulatory authorities, and law enforcement agencies, particularly in the period leading to the 2025 general elections. Political parties, civil society organizations, activists, and human rights defenders operated within a regulatory and political environment that involved administrative oversight, police regulation of political activities, and legal disputes relating to political participation and electoral processes.

##### **a) Administrative Regulation of Political Parties and Internal Party Governance**

At the beginning of 2025, political activities of political parties were affected by administrative decisions and regulatory oversight by the Registrar of Political Parties and electoral authorities. Internal political party governance also became subject to administrative decisions by regulatory authorities.

On 13 May 2025, the Registrar of Political Parties revoked the appointments of eight senior leaders of the opposition party CHADEMA following internal party disputes relating to quorum during confirmation by the National Executive Council and directed the party to reconvene its decision making organs in accordance with the party constitution. This decision significantly affected internal party governance and raised concerns regarding administrative interference in internal political party affairs and political association rights. CHADEMA later filed judicial review case<sup>15</sup> challenging the Registrar's decisions, and the High Court granted leave for judicial review and issued an interim stay order against the decisions pending determination of the case.

##### **b) Restrictions on Political Rallies and Political Meetings**

During 2025, political parties, particularly opposition political parties, faced restrictions on public rallies and political meetings. Police authorities issued letters in several regions restricting political rallies and public meetings organized by opposition parties, citing security concerns and public order considerations. These restrictions affected political mobilization, civic engagement, and political participation activities.

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14 [https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/29/tanzania-deepening-repression-threatens-elections?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/29/tanzania-deepening-repression-threatens-elections?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

15 The Registered Trustees of Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo v. The Registrar of Political Parties and Another (Miscellaneous Civil Application No. 000019054 of 2025)

Restrictions on political rallies and political meetings significantly affected the ability of political parties to mobilize supporters, conduct civic engagement activities, and participate effectively in political processes during the election period.

### **c) Restrictions Affecting Civil Society Organizations and Human Rights Defenders**

Freedom of association in 2025 was also affected by incidents involving civil society organizations and human rights defenders. On 12 November 2025, staff of the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) working at White Sands Hotel in Dar es Salaam were subjected to a security operation in the midnight whereby security officers surrounded the hotel premises, confiscated laptops, mobile phones, and identification cards, and ordered staff to report to the Zonal Crimes Office the following day. The equipment was later returned without charges, but the incident raised serious concerns regarding intimidation, surveillance, and interference with civil society activities.



*LHRC staff, including former Executive Director Dr. Hellen Kijo Bisimba, addressing the media following the attack*

THRDC and Tanganyika Law Society (TLS) intervened by accompanying LHRC staff to the Central Police Station in Dar es Salaam following the incident. THRDC noted that the incident appeared to be part of a broader pattern of monitoring and pressure on civil society organizations and human rights defenders, particularly during politically sensitive periods. The incident demonstrated the operational risks faced by civil society organizations and highlighted the impact of security operations on the freedom of association and the ability of civil society organizations to conduct their activities.



#### **4.5.2 Freedom of Assembly**

Freedom of assembly in Tanzania in 2025 was affected by police regulation of public gatherings, permit and notification requirements, restrictions on demonstrations, and law enforcement interventions during political gatherings, protests, and election related demonstrations.

##### **a) Police Restrictions on Political Gatherings and Demonstrations**

Throughout 2025, several incidents were reported where police interfered with political meetings, demonstrations, and public gatherings. Police issued letters restricting public rallies and political meetings organized by political parties in several regions. In some cases, political rallies were prohibited, while in other cases police dispersed public gatherings or arrested participants for unlawful assembly.

During court proceedings involving opposition leaders, including proceedings at Kisutu Resident Magistrate's Court and trial at the High Court, police restricted gatherings and arrested members and supporters who had gathered outside the court. For instance, on 15 September 2025 over 8 people and supporters of the opposition party were arrested at the premises of the High Court of Tanzania and detained at the Central Police station in Dar es Salaam<sup>16</sup>. These incidents demonstrated police control of public gatherings and political mobilization activities.

##### **b) Election Period Demonstrations, Protests and Security Operations**

The election period in October and November 2025 was particularly associated with restrictions on public gatherings and demonstrations across the country. Following the disputed general elections held in October 2025, protests and demonstrations erupted in several parts of the country, including Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Arusha, Mbeya, Mwanza, Mara, and other regions. Security forces responded to the demonstrations with force, including the use of tear gas, live ammunition, arrests, curfews, and restrictions on movement and public gatherings. These incidents significantly affected political gatherings, protests, demonstrations, and civic engagement activities during the election period.

During the election period and immediately after the elections, there were mass arrests of demonstrators, political supporters, citizens and activists in several parts of the country. Over 2,045 people were arrested in relation to election related demonstrations and security operations conducted in different regions of Tanzania.

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16 <https://www.instagram.com/p/DOnSNI6CCrn/?hl=en>



*Road closures were implemented during the demonstrations as police officers responded to protesters at the scene*



*Burning barricades on the road during the protests.*

These incidents demonstrate that the election period in 2025 was characterized by significant restrictions on freedom of assembly and public gatherings, particularly in the context of protests and demonstrations related to elections, political grievances, and arrests of political leaders. The large number of arrests, detention



of demonstrators, use of force to disperse demonstrations, and restrictions on public gatherings significantly affected civic engagement, political participation, and public discourse during the election period.

#### **4.6 Religious Space**

Religious institutions in Tanzania continued to play an important role in civic engagement, peacebuilding, social services, and public discourse during 2025. Religious leaders and faith-based organizations were actively involved in promoting peace, national unity, human rights, and democratic participation, particularly during the election period. Churches, mosques, and interfaith organizations conducted civic education, peace campaigns, and public statements addressing governance, elections, and human rights issues. However, religious leaders and institutions that spoke on governance, elections, human rights, or security issues occasionally faced pressure, restrictions, intimidation, or attacks, which affected the religious civic space.

One of the most significant incidents affecting religious space in 2025 involved Glory of Christ Tanzania Church, led by Bishop Josephat Gwajima. On 2 June 2025, the Government suspended the operations of Glory of Christ Church shortly after Bishop Gwajima publicly spoke against abductions and enforced disappearances in Tanzania. The suspension order effectively stopped church services and religious gatherings at the church premises and restricted religious activities of the church for several months during the election period.

Following the suspension of the church, on 29 June 2025, a total of 52 members of the Glory of Christ Church were arrested and detained at Oysterbay Police Station in Dar es Salaam after attempting to gather for worship and prayers despite the suspension order. The arrests raised concerns regarding freedom of religion and the right of worshippers to assemble for religious purposes.

Further, law enforcement authorities attempted to arrest Bishop Josephat Gwajima for several months without success. Later, the Tanzania Police Force issued a public notice stating that they were looking for Bishop Gwajima together with nine other CHADEMA leaders and directed them to report to the police. The public notice placed Bishop Gwajima in the context of broader political and security investigations during the election period. Following this development, Bishop Maxmilian Kadutu @ Mwanamapinduzi, the Deputy Secretary General of Glory of Christ Church Tanzania, issued a public statement on 5 September 2025 indicating that he had fled the country due to fears that he was being targeted for arrest or possible abduction.

During the period in which the church remained suspended, police officers guarded the church premises on a daily basis, and religious activities remained prohibited. After the suspension was lifted, church leadership publicly reported that several

church properties had been vandalized or stolen during the period of closure, including CCTV cameras and other equipment, with the church estimating losses amounting to approximately TZS 2.7 billion.

## KANISA LA GWAJIMA: Uongozi wadai upotevu, uharibifu wa Sh2.7 bilioni

Jumapili, Novemba 30, 2025



*The Glory of Christ Church Tanzania reported property damage and losses exceeding TZS 2.7 billion after the suspension ban was lifted*

The suspension of Glory of Christ Church remained in place throughout the election period and was officially lifted on on 24 November 2025 after the general elections, when the Prime Minister publicly announced that the President had directed that the suspension be lifted as part of reconciliation efforts and normalization of the situation, allowing the church to resume its religious activities.

### TANZANIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE SECRETARY ATTACKED

May 1, 2025 Africa Church News Tags: Activists, Cry for peace, Fr. Charles Kitima, Tanzania Episcopal Conference



Father Charles Kitima, the Tanzania Episcopal Conference General Secretary. Photo: IPP Media.

Another major incident affecting religious space involved the attack on Father Charles Kitima, a Catholic priest and Secretary General of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC). Father Kitima was attacked on the night of 30 April 2025 at the Catholic Secretariat in Kurasini, Dar es Salaam, shortly after convening an interfaith meeting involving religious leaders to discuss peace, unity, and human rights ahead of the general elections.



The attackers assaulted him with blunt objects within the premises of the Catholic Secretariat, and he was later admitted to Aga Khan Hospital for treatment.


Religious institutions, particularly the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC), also issued public statements regarding the elections and the situation in the country after the 2025 General Elections. In a statement issued on 15 November 2025, the Tanzania Episcopal Conference expressed concern regarding violence, deaths, injuries, disappearances, and the overall political situation following the elections. The statement emphasized peace, accountability, investigation of killings and violence, respect for human rights, national reconciliation, and the need for constitutional and governance reforms. The statement also called for the release of individuals arrested during the election period and emphasized the importance of justice, truth, and national unity.

THRDC intervened by accompanying LHRC staff to the Central Police Station in Dar es Salaam following the incident. THRDC noted that the incident appeared to be part of a broader pattern of monitoring and pressure on civil society organizations and human rights defenders, particularly during politically sensitive periods. The incident demonstrated the operational risks faced by civil society organizations and highlighted the impact of security operations on the freedom of association and the ability of civil society organizations to conduct their activities.



*The statement by the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) was signed by all Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church on 15 November 2025*

The statement by the Tanzania Episcopal Conference demonstrated the continued role of religious institutions as moral voices in society and as institutions advocating



for peace, accountability, and human rights. Religious institutions also called for dialogue, national reconciliation, investigation of violence, and respect for the rule of law following the election period. Therefore, religious space in Tanzania in 2025 remained active and influential in civic engagement, peacebuilding, and social dialogue.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The state of civic space in Tanzania during 2025 was significantly shaped by legal, administrative, and security measures that affected freedom of expression, association, assembly, media freedom, and political participation, particularly during the general elections. The year was characterized by arrests, restrictions on public gatherings, regulatory actions against media and online platforms, internet shutdowns, and administrative decisions affecting political parties, civil society organizations, journalists, activists, and religious actors. Overall, civic space remained narrowed during 2025, especially throughout the electoral and post-election period.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Overall Findings of the Report

The report finds that the year 2025 was a challenging period for Human Rights Defenders in Tanzania due to the political environment, the general elections, legal and regulatory restrictions, civic space limitations, and security risks including arrests, abductions, digital repression, and legal harassment. Despite these challenges, significant protection interventions were implemented through coordinated efforts by the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) and its partners, including legal support, emergency relocation, advocacy, strategic litigation, monitoring, and capacity building.

The report further finds that protection of human rights defenders in Tanzania relies heavily on civil society protection mechanisms rather than formal state protection systems, indicating the need for stronger national legal and institutional protection frameworks for human rights defenders.

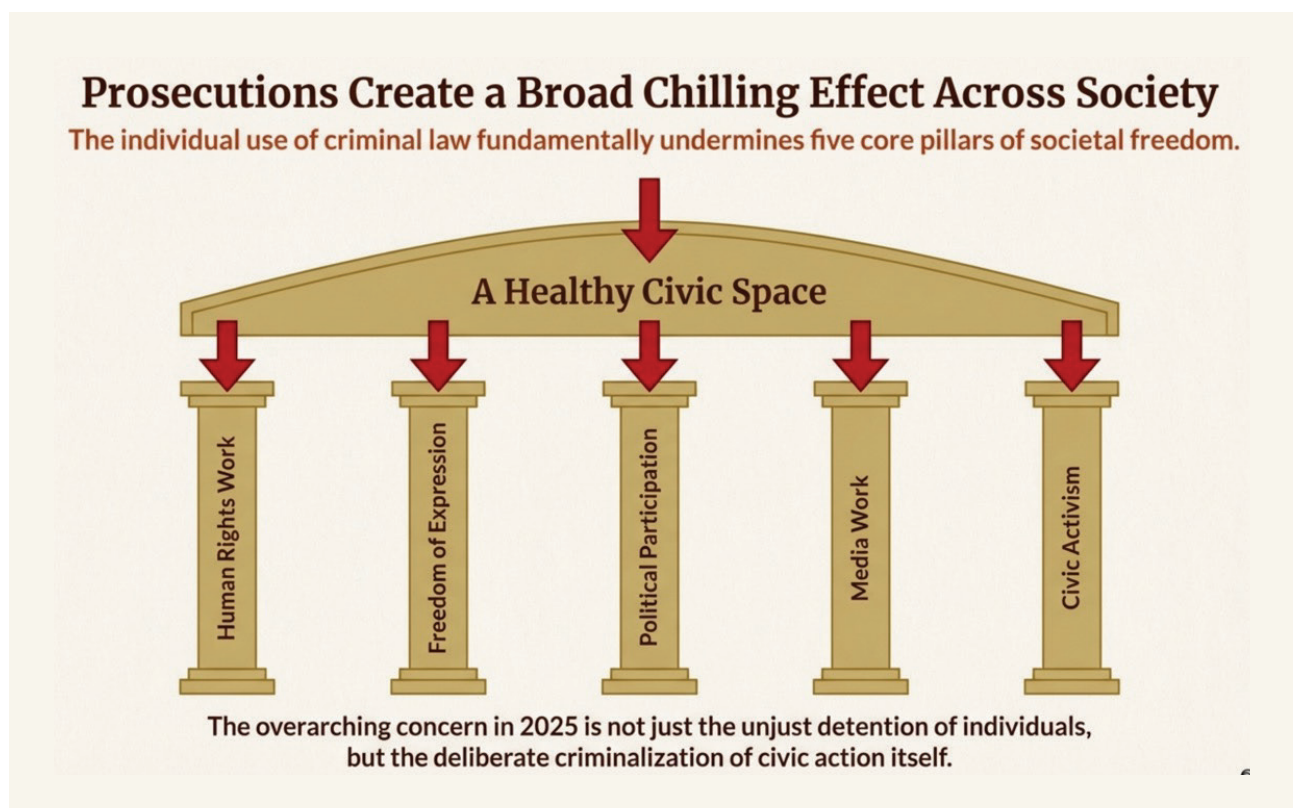
## 5.2 Trends in Civic Space and HRDs Situation

The major trends observed in 2025 include:

- a) Shrinking civic space, particularly during the general election period;
- b) Increase in arrests, prosecutions, and criminal charges against HRDs, journalists, and political actors;
- c) Increase in abductions and enforced disappearances;
- d) Increased digital repression, including internet shutdowns and blocking of social media platforms;
- e) Increased regulation and control of media, online platforms, civil society organizations, and political activities;
- f) Increased police regulation of public assemblies and political gatherings;

- g) Mass arrests and killings during election related protests and demonstrations;
- h) Increased surveillance and monitoring of civil society organizations;
- i) Financial challenges affecting civil society organizations and HRDs;
- j) Increased use of strategic litigation and legal advocacy to challenge restrictive laws;
- k) Increased engagement between civil society and government on legal and policy reforms;
- l) Strengthening of HRDs protection mechanisms through networks, legal support, and emergency response interventions.

These trends indicate that while civic space remained operational, it experienced significant restrictions, particularly during politically sensitive periods.



### 5.3 Rule of Law and Governance Concerns

The report identifies several rule of law and governance concerns in Tanzania during 2025, including:

- a) Limited judicial oversight over certain electoral decisions;



- b) Non implementation of some court decisions;
- c) Prolonged pre-trial detention and delays in court proceedings;
- d) Use of criminal laws and serious charges such as treason against political actors and ordinary citizens;
- e) Unlawful restrictions on public access to court proceedings;
- f) Extensive regulatory powers exercised by administrative authorities over NGOs, media, political parties, and online platforms;
- g) Restriction of public assemblies and demonstrations by the law enforcers.
- h) Lack of a specific legal and policy framework for the protection of Human Rights Defenders;
- i) Use of laws regulating cybercrime, media, online content, and public assemblies to restrict civic space;
- j) Uninvestigation of incidents of abductions, disappearances, and attacks against human rights defenders and political activists;


These governance and rule of law concerns affected civic space, access to justice, political participation, and the protection of human rights defenders.

#### **5.4 Electoral and Political Environment Findings**

The report finds that the 2025 General Elections had a significant impact on civic space, human rights, and the political environment in Tanzania. Key findings include:

- a) Restrictions on political rallies and political meetings especially for oppositions;
- b) Arrests of political leaders, supporters, and activists;
- c) Legal disputes relating to candidate nominations, political party leadership, and electoral participation;
- d) Administrative decisions affecting political party participation in elections;
- e) Internet shutdowns and digital restrictions during the election period;
- f) Mass arrests, killings and security operations during election related protests;
- g) Restrictions on election observation and civic engagement;
- h) Use of curfews, security operations, and police force during protests;
- i) Increased political tensions and legal contestations surrounding the elections.

Overall, the electoral period significantly contributed to the narrowing of civic space



and increased risks for human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, political actors, and civil society organizations.

### **5.5. Key Human Rights Defenders Concerns**

- a) Arbitrary arrests and detention;
- b) Abductions and enforced disappearances;
- c) Torture and ill-treatment of detainees;
- d) Restrictions on freedom of expression;
- e) Arrests and harassment of journalists;
- f) Media bans and suspension of media platforms;
- g) Blocking of social media platforms;
- h) Internet shutdowns;
- i) Restrictions on freedom of assembly and demonstrations;
- j) Restrictions on political participation and political rallies;
- k) Mass arrests and killings during election related protests;
- l) Surveillance and intimidation of civil society organizations;
- m) Forced evictions and land conflicts;
- n) Attacks against religious leaders and pressure on religious institutions;
- o) Legal harassment through criminal charges;
- p) Prolonged pre-trial detention and delays in justice;
- q) Financial constraints affecting civil society organizations and HRDs protection mechanisms.

These concerns demonstrate that the human rights defenders environment in Tanzania during 2025 was significantly influenced by political, legal, and digital governance factors.

### **5.6 Recommendations**


#### **a) Government of Tanzania**

The Government of Tanzania plays a primary role in the promotion, protection, and fulfillment of human rights through laws, policies, institutions, and administrative actions. As the main duty bearer under the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania and international human rights obligations, the Government is responsible for ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, maintaining the rule of law, and creating an enabling environment for civil society, media, political actors, and Human Rights Defenders to operate freely and safely. In light of the civic space and human rights situation observed, the Government is encouraged to undertake the following measures:



The Government should:

- a) Develop and adopt a national policy and law for the recognition, protection, and promotion of Human Rights Defenders, including consideration of the Human Rights Defenders Policy developed by THRDC.
- b) Investigate all cases of abductions, enforced disappearances, torture, killings, and other serious human rights violations and ensure that perpetrators are identified, prosecuted, and held accountable in accordance with the law.
- c) Address the culture of impunity by ensuring prompt, independent, and impartial investigations into human rights violations against citizens, journalists, lawyers, and Human Rights Defenders, and ensure that victims obtain timely effective remedies.
- d) Establish an independent Police oversight body responsible for overseeing police conduct and investigating complaints and allegations of misconduct, abuse of power, and human rights violations by law enforcement officers.
- e) Form an independent special commission to investigate cases involving Human Rights Defenders and citizens who were abducted or those faced enforced disappearances
- f) Review and amend laws affecting civic space, including laws regulating media, NGOs, cybercrime, online content, statistics, and public assemblies, in order to ensure compliance with the Constitution of Tanzania and international human rights standards.
- g) Remove unnecessary regulatory requirements that restrict freedom of expression, including the compulsory registration of YouTube channels and other online platforms that are not operating as formal media outlets.
- h) Ensure that internet shutdowns, blocking of communication platforms, and other forms of digital restrictions are not imposed, as they violate freedom of expression, access to information, and economic activities.
- i) Ensure that law enforcement agencies respect and protect the rights to freedom of assembly, association, and expression, and refrain from unnecessary limitations, interference, intimidation, or excessive use of force in the exercise of these constitutional rights.
- j) Revive the process of developing a new Constitution for the United Republic of Tanzania through an inclusive and participatory constitutional reform process.

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- k) Issue an official apology and undertake reconciliation efforts with families and Tanzanians who lost their loved ones during incidents of election related violence in 2025, and ensure justice for victims.
  - l) Ensure that perpetrators of killings during the 2025 General Election are investigated, apprehended, and prosecuted in accordance with the law.
  - m) Implement the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Reform Commission regarding reforms in the criminal justice system and institutions in Tanzania.
  - n) Strengthen cooperation and dialogue between government institutions and civil society organizations on governance, human rights, legal reforms, and democratic development.
  - o) Review and reform electoral laws and regulations to ensure that elections are conducted in a free, fair, transparent, credible, and inclusive environment that guarantees equal participation of all political actors, civil society organizations, the media, and citizens, and that the electoral process is conducted without intimidation, violence, undue restrictions, or interference.
  - p) Strengthen institutional protection mechanisms for journalists, lawyers, civil society actors, and Human Rights Defenders who are at risk due to their work.
  - q) Respect and implement decisions of national, regional, and international courts relating to human rights, governance, and rule of law.
  - r) Ensure inclusive participation of the public and key stakeholders when developing laws and policies related to media, access to information, governance, and freedom of expression.
  - s) Promote human rights education and awareness, particularly within law enforcement agencies, government institutions, and the general public to improve understanding of human rights principles, constitutionalism, and the rule of law.
  - t) Work with Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society Organizations as partners in development and governance rather than treating them as adversaries.

#### **b) The Judiciary of Tanzania**

The Judiciary plays a central role in upholding the Constitution, protecting human rights, and ensuring the rule of law. An independent, accessible, and efficient judiciary is essential for the protection of fundamental rights, resolution of disputes, and maintenance of democratic governance. In this regard, the Judiciary is encouraged



to continue strengthening its role in the protection and promotion of human rights and constitutionalism in Tanzania.

**The Judiciary should:**


- a) Strengthen judicial independence, impartiality, and professionalism in order to enhance public confidence in the justice system and ensure effective administration of justice.
- b) Ensure timely and efficient hearing and determination of criminal, civil, constitutional, electoral, and human rights cases in order to reduce delays and improve access to justice.
- c) Strengthen the protection of fair trial rights, due process, and the rights of accused persons, litigants, and detainees in accordance with the Constitution and international human rights standards.
- d) Continue supporting and promoting public interest litigation and constitutional justice as important tools for the protection of human rights, accountability, and development of constitutional jurisprudence.
- e) Promote the principle of open justice by ensuring public access to court proceedings and judgments, particularly in matters of public interest, constitutional law, governance, and human rights.
- f) Strengthen judicial oversight over administrative, executive, and electoral decisions in cases where constitutional rights, rule of law, and principles of natural justice are affected.
- g) Continue developing human rights jurisprudence through progressive interpretation of the Constitution and laws in line with regional and international human rights standards.

**c) Political Parties**

Political parties are key actors in democratic governance, political participation, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. Their conduct and commitment to democratic principles significantly influence civic space, political stability, and respect for human rights in the country. In this regard, political parties are encouraged to strengthen democratic practices, promote peaceful political engagement, and contribute to national dialogue and reforms.

**Political parties should:**

- a) Promote peaceful political participation, democratic dialogue, and constructive political engagement in order to strengthen democratic governance and political stability in the country.

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- b) Respect and uphold internal party democracy, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law in their internal leadership, decision-making processes, and party activities.
  - c) Refrain from incitement to violence, hate speech, and political confrontation, and instead promote political tolerance, coexistence, and issue-based politics.
  - d) Promote peaceful, free, and fair elections by encouraging their members and supporters to respect electoral laws, democratic principles, and the rights of other political actors.
  - e) Engage in constructive dialogue on constitutional, legal, and electoral reforms in order to strengthen democracy, rule of law, governance, and political participation in Tanzania.
  - f) Respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic principles in all political activities, campaigns, and public engagements.
  - g) Encourage the participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in political processes in order to promote inclusive democracy and equal political participation.

#### **d) Civil Society Organizations**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a central role in the promotion, protection, and advancement of human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance in Tanzania. In the context of increasing restrictions and risks facing Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), civil society organizations are encouraged to strengthen their institutional capacity, collaboration, and protection mechanisms.

#### **Civil society organizations should:**

- a) Strengthen coordination, collaboration, and protection networks for Human Rights Defenders at national, regional, and international levels in order to improve information sharing, emergency response, and collective advocacy.
- b) Continue monitoring, documenting, and reporting human rights violations, civic space developments, and governance issues in order to promote accountability and evidence-based advocacy.
- c) Strengthen advocacy initiatives aimed at legal, policy, and institutional reforms, particularly reforms related to civic space, media freedom, access to information, rule of law, and democratic governance.
- d) Strengthen digital security, organizational security, and risk management mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders and civil society organizations, including data protection, secure communication, and risk assessment practices.



- e) Strengthen institutional governance, transparency, accountability, and long-term sustainability of civil society organizations through improved organizational systems, leadership development, and resource mobilization strategies.
- f) Strengthen collaboration with media, lawyers, academia, and international organizations in promoting human rights, strategic litigation, public interest advocacy, and public awareness.
- g) Engage and collaborate more actively with regional and international human rights mechanisms, including regional networks, special rapporteurs, treaty bodies, and international human rights organizations in advocacy, reporting, protection, and human rights interventions.
- h) Promote public awareness and human rights education among communities in order to strengthen public participation, accountability, and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

#### e) Human Rights Defenders

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), including journalists, lawyers, political activists, online activists, and community activists, continue to play a vital role in promoting accountability, protecting fundamental rights and freedoms, and advancing democratic governance in Tanzania. In light of the increasing risks, restrictions, and pressures faced by HRDs, it is important that defenders remain principled, strategic, resilient, and mindful of their personal safety, well-being, and professional credibility.

#### Human Rights Defenders should:

- a) **Strengthen professionalism, integrity, and ethical conduct** in their work in order to maintain credibility, public trust, and legitimacy in human rights advocacy and public engagement.
- b) **Journalists should continue to perform their professional duty with integrity and courage**, by informing the public accurately, responsibly, and ethically despite the increasingly restrictive environment. Society depends on credible journalism to understand unfolding events, particularly during periods of political and social tension.
- c) **Activists are encouraged to remain steadfast in defending human rights**, while ensuring that advocacy and activism are conducted through lawful, ethical, and respectful means by avoiding incitement, misinformation, hate speech, or abusive language, and instead promoting constructive dialogue and peaceful engagement.



- d) **Lawyers should continue to provide strong legal defense, pursue strategic litigation, and uphold the rule of law**, including representing vulnerable groups and Human Rights Defenders, and challenging unlawful actions through courts and other institutional mechanisms.
- e) **Strengthen digital security, personal security, and risk management practices**, including secure communication, data protection, safe travel planning, and awareness of surveillance and online threats.
- f) **Strengthen collaboration and solidarity among Human Rights Defenders**, civil society organizations, media, and professional associations in order to enhance protection, rapid response, information sharing, and joint advocacy.
- g) **Enhance documentation and reporting of human rights violations and abuses**, including maintaining accurate records, evidence, and case documentation to support advocacy, litigation, and reporting to national, regional, and international mechanisms.
- h) **Engage constructively with national, regional, and international human rights mechanisms**, including human rights commissions, courts, regional bodies, and international organizations in reporting violations and seeking protection and accountability.
- i) **Prioritize mental health, well-being, and burnout prevention**, given the psychological toll of threats, harassment, and sustained pressure. Establishing peer support systems, taking restorative breaks, and seeking professional support where necessary is essential for long-term effectiveness and sustainability of human rights work.
- j) **Invest in continuous learning and capacity building**, including training on digital security, strategic litigation, advocacy, documentation, negotiation, and security management.
- k) **Promote public awareness on human rights and civic education** within communities in order to strengthen public participation, community support, and protection of Human Rights Defenders.

#### **f) Development Partners**

Development partners play a critical role in supporting human rights, governance, rule of law, and civil society sustainability in Tanzania. In the context of shrinking civic space and increasing risks faced by Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), development partners are encouraged to continue supporting programmes that strengthen protection mechanisms, institutional capacity, and democratic governance.




### **Development partners should:**

- a) Continue supporting Human Rights Defenders protection programmes, including emergency response, relocation support, digital security, and capacity building for organizations working on human rights protection.
- b) Support legal aid programmes, strategic litigation, and civic space protection initiatives aimed at strengthening access to justice, constitutionalism, and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.
- c) Support institutional strengthening, organizational development, and long-term sustainability of civil society organizations, including core funding and capacity building in governance, financial management, advocacy, and protection work.
- d) Support digital rights, media freedom, access to information, and freedom of expression initiatives, including programmes addressing digital security, internet freedom, and protection of journalists and online activists.
- e) Support rule of law, justice sector reforms, democratic governance, and accountability programmes aimed at strengthening institutions such as the judiciary, legal aid systems, oversight bodies, and human rights institutions.
- f) Encourage constructive dialogue and engagement between government and civil society organizations on governance, human rights, legal reforms, and democratic development.
- g) Support research, documentation, and monitoring of human rights situations, civic space, and governance trends in order to inform policy reforms and advocacy interventions.

### **g) Regional and International Mechanisms**

Regional and international human rights mechanisms play an important role in promoting, monitoring, and supporting the protection of human rights defenders, civic space, rule of law, and democratic governance in Tanzania. In this regard, the regional and international mechanisms should continue strengthening their engagement with Tanzania on human rights and governance issues. They should specifically.

- a) Continue monitoring the situation of human rights defenders, civic space, rule of law, and democratic governance in Tanzania.
- b) Encourage and support the implementation of recommendations from regional and international human rights mechanisms, including recommendations of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, decisions of the African



Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Universal Periodic Review, and UN treaty body recommendations relating to human rights, governance, and civic space.

- c) Engage constructively with the Government of Tanzania on issues relating to human rights protection, rule of law, democratic governance, and protection of human rights defenders.
- d) Support legal, policy, and institutional reforms aimed at improving the protection of human rights defenders and expanding civic space in Tanzania.
- e) Support civil society organizations and human rights defenders working on human rights, governance, democracy, and rule of law through capacity building, technical assistance, and protection support programs.
- f) Support and encourage the development and implementation of national protection frameworks and mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders in Tanzania.
- g) Strengthen regional and international protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, including emergency protection, relocation support, trial monitoring, and advocacy interventions.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The situation of Human Rights Defenders and civic space in Tanzania during 2025 was significantly affected by the general elections, political tensions, restrictive legal and regulatory measures, digital repression, and law enforcement practices. The year was characterized by arrests, abductions, enforced disappearances, restrictions on political participation, attacks on journalists and activists, and shrinking civic space, particularly during the election period. Despite these challenges, Human Rights Defenders, civil society organizations, and legal institutions continued to promote accountability, rule of law, and protection of human rights. The experiences of 2025 demonstrated the urgent need for stronger protection mechanisms, legal and policy reforms, judicial independence, and constructive engagement between state institutions and civil society to ensure a safe and enabling environment for Human Rights Defenders and civic space in Tanzania.

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