



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND CIVIC SPACE IN TANZANIA TANZANIA'S UPR 4TH CYCLE UPR INFO Pre-Session

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM PREVIOUS CYCLE

During Tanzania's third UPR cycle, civic space recommendations covered freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. In assessing the implementation of 187 recommendations accepted in 2021 across several thematic areas, mixed progress is found, while civil and political rights, civic space and protection of HRDs remain significant concerns. The 2025 general elections intensified these concerns through reported violence, restrictions on assembly, killings, internet shutdowns and intimidation of journalists, HRDs and observers.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania guarantees freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and participation in public affairs. Tanzania is also bound by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Over the past four years, the Government has undertaken a number of legal and institutional reforms affecting civic space, democratic governance and human rights. The 2023 amendment of the Media Services Act, 2016, through the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act No. 5 of 2023. The amendment revised nine provisions of the Act and removed the provision that exposed persons to criminal liability for publication of defamatory matter, thereby moving defamation under the Act towards civil redress. The current Act provides for persons alleging defamatory media content to seek redress through the courts.

In 2024, Tanzania enacted and amended legislation governing the electoral process and political parties, including the Independent National Electoral Commission Act and the Parliamentary and Councilors' Elections Act. These reforms were intended to strengthen the electoral framework, although civil society continues to identify significant gaps concerning electoral independence, political participation, accountability and the ability of opposition parties, observers and CSOs to operate freely.

Despite these developments, substantial restrictions remain within the legal and regulatory framework governing civic space. The Media Services Act, Cybercrimes Act, Political Parties Act and regulations governing online content and communications continue to contain provisions that can restrict freedom of expression, media freedom, association and political participation. The current Media Services Act, for example, retains criminal offences relating to certain publications, licensing and accreditation, as well as provisions on seditious offences and publications likely to cause fear and alarm.

Tanzania has also made limited progress in establishing a comprehensive protection framework for Human Rights Defenders. There remains no dedicated national law or policy specifically recognizing and protecting HRDs from reprisals, intimidation, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and other forms of harassment. The National Human Rights Action Plan 2018–2022 lapsed without full implementation.

The central concern is therefore the gap between legal reform and effective implementation. Recent reforms provide important openings, particularly in media regulation and political participation, but restrictive provisions

remain and institutional safeguards, accountability mechanisms and implementation of constitutional and human rights guarantees remain insufficient. The fourth UPR cycle should therefore focus on completing legal reforms, strengthening independent institutions and ensuring that rights are protected not only in law but also in practice.

CHALLENGES

1. **Restrictive civic-space framework** - From 2022–2025, major reforms to the Media Services Act, Cybercrimes Act and Political Parties Act were insufficient to bring the framework fully in line with international standards. Administrative and regulatory powers continue to affect expression, association, assembly and political participation. The suspension and shutdown of online media houses and blogs is a continuous reprisal of freedom of expression.
2. **Electoral restrictions and accountability** - The 2025 elections occurred amid unresolved demands for electoral and constitutional reform. More than 2,045 people were arrested in connection with election-related protests and unrest; CSO reporting identifies serious concerns regarding violence, due process, enforced disappearances and lack of credible accountability. Opposition contestants were banned from participating in the elections, having one opposition leader in custody until today.
3. **Protection gap for HRDs** - Tanzania lacks dedicated legislation or policy protecting HRDs. HRDs continue to face arrests, prosecutions, intimidation, surveillance and reprisals. During the 2025 elections, targeting intensified and some HRDs fled and sought asylum in neighbouring countries.
4. **Digital repression and media freedom** - THRDC documented over 80,171 online platforms reportedly closed as of 31 March 2025, 11 online television platforms suspended in Zanzibar, and a nationwide internet blackout during the election period. Journalists also faced harassment, arrest and restrictions while covering political and court proceedings. Currently, we have witnessed lawyers and advocates being banned from speaking to the media at the court premises after the court session. This is a continuous shrinking of access to information.
5. **Rule of law and access to justice** - Prolonged pre-trial detention, non-bailable offences and delays in politically sensitive cases. There is a rise in concerns about access to lawyers, open justice and treatment of detainees during politically sensitive proceedings.

IMPACTS ON RIGHTS-HOLDERS

- HRDs, journalists, lawyers, activists and political actors face heightened exposure to arrest, intimidation, harassment, surveillance, abduction and other reprisals.
- Restrictions on civic participation reduce the ability of citizens and civil society to monitor elections, document violations, advocate reforms and hold institutions accountable.
- Internet shutdowns and platform restrictions obstruct access to information, public communication and documentation of rights violations, particularly during politically sensitive periods.
- Prolonged pre-trial detention, non-bailable offences and restrictions on legal representation undermine fair-trial guarantees and access to justice.
- Persistent impunity for serious violations weakens public confidence in state institutions and reinforces a chilling effect on civic engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF TANZANIA

1. Adopt and implement a dedicated national Human Rights Defenders policy and law, including consideration of the HRD Policy developed by THRDC.
2. Establish an independent, impartial and transparent mechanism to investigate abductions, enforced disappearances, torture, killings and threats against HRDs, journalists and political actors, with public reporting and effective remedies.
3. Repeal or amend restrictive provisions governing online expression, particularly section 16 of the Cybercrimes Act, 2015, and vague provisions of the Online Content Regulations that criminalise “false”, “deceptive” or “misleading” information without adequate safeguards.
4. Ensure internet shutdowns and blocking of communication platforms are not imposed and remove unnecessary regulatory requirements affecting online expression.
5. Guarantee freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression and prohibit unnecessary interference, intimidation and excessive use of force.
6. Ensure transparent and effective transitional justice for violations linked to the 2025 general electoral period, including independent investigations, prosecution and adequate remedies for victims.
7. Strengthen judicial independence, fair-trial safeguards, open justice and timely determination of politically sensitive cases; abolish non-bailable offences and guarantee the right to bail.
8. Revive an inclusive and participatory constitutional reform process

QUESTIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF TANZANIA

1. What concrete steps will Tanzania take to adopt and implement a dedicated legal and policy framework for the protection of HRDs?
2. What independent mechanism will investigate reported abductions, enforced disappearances, torture, killings and other serious violations linked to the 2025 electoral period?
3. How will Tanzania ensure that media, cybercrime, NGO and public-assembly laws comply with international human rights standards?
4. What safeguards will prevent internet shutdowns and other digital restrictions from being used to limit civic participation and access to information?
5. How will the Government guarantee free, safe and inclusive participation of political parties, CSOs, journalists, observers and citizens in future electoral processes?

SOURCES

1. Joint CSOs’ 4th Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Cycle Tanzania Report – 53rd Session (April 2026), coordinated preparation by LHRC, THRDC and Save the Children Tanzania.
2. Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Civic Space in Tanzania, 2025.

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