



ACHPR
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Intersession Report

Presented by

Honourable Commissioner Topsy-Sonoo

**Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in
Africa.**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter) provides that: "(1) every individual shall have the right to receive information;" and "(2) every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the law."
2. The special mechanism on freedom of expression in Africa was established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Commission) to monitor adherence to freedom of expression standards and to propose appropriate recommendations to the Commission and States Parties. It was subsequently expanded to include the right to access information.¹
3. This report is presented in accordance with Rules 25(3) and 64 of the Commission's Rules of Procedure (2020) and covers activities undertaken by the special mechanism on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa, during the intersession period between **November 2025** to **May 2026**.

II. ACTIVITIES INVOLVING THE SPECIAL MECHANISM

Protection activities (Press releases and urgent appeals)

4. In line with special mechanism's mandate to "make public interventions where violations of the right to freedom of expression and access to information have been brought to the mechanism's attention, including by issuing public statements, press releases, and sending appeals to Member States asking for clarifications," the following interventions were issued:

LETTERS OF URGENT APPEAL

- **Joint Letters of Urgent Appeal to Uganda**

5. The following letters were sent to the Republic of Uganda:

➔ On 13 December 2025, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued regarding human rights violations committed during the electoral period. The Letter requested clarification regarding the reported arrests of over five hundred and fifty (550) NUP members and supporters, in addition to reports of arrests in Kampala, Lira, Arua and Mbarara reportedly related to participation in the

¹ During the 36th Ordinary Session held in December 2004, the Commission adopted Resolution 71 on the Mandate and Appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression in Africa, and during the 42nd Ordinary Session in November 2007 adopted Resolution 122 on the Expansion of the Mandate and Re-appointment of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa

party's campaign, and further called on the State to investigate all reports of attacks against journalists and other media practitioners, in addition to attacks on media houses.

- ➔ On 08 January 2026, a Joint Letter of Appeal was issued in response to the reported arbitrary arrest and detention of Dr. Sarah Bireete. The Letter requested clarification on the allegations and called on the Government to secure Dr. Bireete's immediate release, given the arbitrary nature of her arrest and detention.
- ➔ On 14 January 2026, a Joint Letter of Appeal was issued in response to reports of the suspension of public internet access, selected mobile service and the permits of civil society organizations during the election period. The Letter requested clarification of the allegations and further called on the Government to immediately restore full internet access and mobile communication services, in addition to reinstating the permits of all suspended civil society organizations.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Egypt**

6. On 09 February 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued regarding the alleged arrest and judicial harassment of Mr. Ahmed Douma, a Human Rights Defender in Egypt, who was reportedly detained and interrogated for 12 hours at the National Security Agency, blindfolded for hours, subjected to reported assault and denied basic necessities including a blanket despite the cold conditions. Mr. Douma was reportedly charged with spreading false information and misleading public opinion in Egypt and abroad, in connection with an investigative article he published. The Letter requested an investigation into the circumstances related to his arrest and detention.
7. On 17 April 2026, a response was received from the Government of Egypt regarding the issues raised in the Letter of Appeal, which is noted with thanks.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Cameroun**

8. On 23 February 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the arrest and prolonged detention of several individuals following the post-election situation in Cameroon following the presidential election on 12 October 2025, which resulted in approximately 1,985 people being arrested, of whom 615 were released on bail and 963 remaining in detention. The Letter requested clarification on the reports and requested investigation into the circumstances surrounding the continued detention of all persons arrested during the post-election crisis, where appropriate, in addition to their release if no charges were brought against them.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Algeria**

9. On 23 February 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the arrest and detention of Mr. Omar Ferhat, also known by the pseudonym Karim Kaki, director of the local independent news website Algérie Scoop and Mr. Abdelali Mezghicher, journalist and poet with a large following on social networks. The Letter requested clarification of the reports received, requested an investigation into the arrest and detention and ensure their release if no charges were brought against them, in addition to calling on the Government to implement adequate practical safeguards to ensure respect for all the rights of Mr. Omar Ferhat and Mr. Abdelali Mezghiche related to due process, so that they can defend themselves before an impartial and independent tribunal.
10. In its response submitted on 19 March 2026, clarification was provided indicating that the proceedings against Mr. Ferhat and Mr. Mezghiche are not linked to the exercise of their journalistic activity or to the expression of a legitimate opinion; rather was the result of specific facts which were assessed by the competent judicial authorities in the context of the application of the law.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Gabon**

11. On 25 February 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the suspension of social networks in Gabon, reportedly as a measure to prevent the spread of false information. Reports indicated that access to major social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, were blocked in the country. The Letter requested clarification on the reports and called on the Government to reverse the social media shutdown order, restore access in Gabon, in addition to refraining from interrupting or limiting access to the Internet, social media and messaging services.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Mali**

12. On 27 February 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the sentencing of Mr. Moussa Mara in the first instance by the National Cybercrime Unit to two years in prison, one of which is to be served without parole, and further, the Bamako Court of Appeals upheld his conviction maintaining the sentence and fine imposed in the first instance. Mr. Mara's conviction was reportedly linked to a post he made on the social media platform X on 04 July 2025 and following this post he was reportedly prosecuted for undermining the credibility of the State, opposition to legitimate authority and incitement to disturb public order. The Letter requested clarification on the reported allegations, in addition to requesting the State to conduct investigations, where

appropriate, and to implement adequate practical safeguards to ensure respect for all rights related to fair trials.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Ethiopia**

13. On 04 March 2026, a Joint Letter of Appeal was issued regarding the revocation of registration of the Addis Standard, an independent media outlet in Ethiopia under the Media Proclamation. The Letter requested clarification regarding the reported revocation, called for reinstatement of Addis Standard's online media registration certificate, and urged a review of all criminal restrictions of content to ensure that they are justifiable and compatible with international human rights law and standards.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Egypt**

14. On 16 March 2026, a Joint Letter of Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the charges and heavy bail against Ms. Aida Seif El-Dawla, woman human rights defender. It is reported that on 15 February 2026, Ms. Aida Seif El-Dawla appeared before the Dokki Prosecution Office in response to a summons she had received, she was interrogated and informed that she was being charged with spreading false news in Egypt and abroad with the aim of disrupting public security and peace and causing confusion.
15. The Letter requested clarification on the veracity of the reports, in addition to requesting authorities to conduct investigations into the circumstances related to the arrest and detention of Ms. El-Dawla, to drop all charges against her if no credible evidence was available and to cease all forms of judicial harassment. The Letter also called on the Government to guarantee that all human rights defenders in Egypt can carry out their work without the fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Algeria**

16. On 18 March 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the arrest, detention, and conviction of Mr. Tahar Ouahachi, a lecturer in history at the Faculty of Humanities at Lounici-Ali University in Blida, Mr. Mustapha Nouicer, a historian at the University of Algiers, Mr. Zine-El-Abidine Khodja, a professor of philosophy in Oran and Mr. Chérif Mellal, the former president of the Jeunesse Sportive de Kabylie. The Letter requested clarification on the reported arrests, requested that investigations are conducted, where appropriate, into the circumstances surrounding their arrest and detention, in

addition to implementing adequate practical safeguards to ensure respect for the rights to a fair trial before an impartial and independent court.

17. On 07 May 2026, a response was received regarding the Letter of Appeal, which provided on the legal basis for prosecution, the fair trial guarantees applied, as well as the remedies exercised.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Benin**

18. On 21 April 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the prolonged detention of Mr. Hugues Comlan Sosoukpe, the director of the online media outlet Olofofo, former Secretary-General and spokesperson of the Beninese Association of Web Activists (ABWA). Mr. Sosoukpe is reportedly a journalist, whistleblower, and human rights defender, who was reportedly forced to flee the country after denouncing the decisions of the Beninese authorities following the 2019 elections and settled in Togo where he held refugee status since 2021. Mr. Sosoukpe was reportedly abducted by police officers in Abidjan and handed over to Beninese authorities, while he was in Côte d'Ivoire to attend the Ivoire Tech Forum. He was reportedly denied access to an attorney and family visits and subjected to concerning detention conditions, including suspension of his right to two hours of daily exercise.
19. The Letter requested investigation into the circumstances surrounding the continued detention of Mr. Sosoukpe and called for his release if no charges were brought against him, in addition to implementing adequate practical safeguards to ensure respect for his rights to a fair trial.

- **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Guinea Bissau**

20. On 07 May 2026, a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal was issued in response to reports received regarding the assassination of Mr. Vigário Luís Balanta, President of the citizens' movement *Pó di Terra*. Reports indicate that Mr. Balanta was found dead on Tuesday 31 March 2026, in the rice fields of N'Dam Lero, near Bissau, beaten to death. His body was discovered with multiple signs of physical violence, including traces of stab wounds, bullet holes to the head, an open wound to his foot and torn and bloody clothing. Further reports indicate that, on the afternoon of 01 April 2026, authorities suspended several private radio stations for a period of seven (7) days, for alleged lack of a licence, shortly after the media announcement of the death of Mr. Balanta.

21. The Letter requested the authorities to pursue an independent and impartial investigation into the Mr. Balanta's murder and to bring to justice the perpetrators of the crime, if necessary.

LETTERS OF COMMENDATION

22. In addition to interventions in situations where violations have occurred, the Special Mechanism issues letters of commendation and appreciation, noting measures taken by States Parties to implement the rights of access to information and freedom of expression.

- **Letter of Appreciation to Uganda**

23. On 06 February 2026, a Joint Letter of Appreciation was issued commending the release of Dr. Sarah Bireete in Uganda. The Letter noted that the release was an important step towards recognizing the participation of human rights defenders during the electoral process.

- **Letter of Commendation to The Gambia**

24. On 27 April 2026, a Joint Letter of Commendation was issued welcoming the launch of the National Misinformation and Disinformation Response Centre (NMDRC) by the Government of The Gambia on 25 April 2026. This Centre was established in response to the growing spread of misinformation and disinformation across digital and social media platforms in The Gambia. The Letter, however, reiterated that all measures to address disinformation and misinformation should not violate the rights to free expression and access to information.

PRESS STATEMENTS

Press Release on the Suspension of Public Internet Access, Selected Mobile Services and Civil Society Organizations' Permits during the Election Period in Uganda

25. On 16 January 2026, a Press Statement was issued regarding suspension of public internet access, in addition to recurring restrictions on the rights to freedom of association and assembly in the Republic of Uganda on the eve of the general elections held on 15 January 2026. The Press Release called on the Government of Uganda, *inter alia*, to immediately restore full internet access and mobile communication services, reinstate the permits of all suspended Civil Society Organizations, guarantee that any restrictions on fundamental rights comply with Uganda's obligations under the African Charter and other relevant regional and international human rights instruments, in addition to taking all necessary

measures to ensure the protection of journalists, human rights defenders, civil society actors and the general population during the electoral period.

Statement commemorating World Press Freedom Day, 03 May 2026

26. A Press Statement was issued commemorating **World Press Freedom Day**, on 03 May 2026, which, *inter alia*, reaffirmed the key role of the media and other means of communication in ensuring full respect for the right to freedom of expression, promoting the free flow of information and ideas, assisting individuals in making informed decisions and facilitating and strengthening democracy. The Statement called on States to uphold the fundamental principles on press freedom in Africa and commended all journalists who assiduously speak truth to power, often in difficult situations.

Promotion activities

27. The following promotion activities were undertaken during the intersession period:
- I have participated in a number of online meetings with a view to developing the draft guidelines for resolution 620, 630 and 631.
 - I attended the Just A1 Conference organised by Research ICT on 30-31 March 2026
 - I attended the PANAF summit on Artistic Freedom from 06-08 Feb 2026.

III. ACTIVITIES AS COUNTRY RAPPORTEUR

28. In line with my mandate as the Commissioner rapporteur for the human rights situation in a number of States Parties, I undertook the following:

Protection activities

• **Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Tanzania**

29. On 12 May 2026, a Letter of Urgent Appeal was transmitted to the Government of Tanzania in response to reports of the displacement of Indigenous Communities in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, which spans over 829,000 hectares and is home to approximately 100,000 people, is central to the cultural identity and livelihoods of indigenous communities, including the Maasai, Datoga and Hadzabe. The reports raise serious concerns about planned reductions in human presence in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and the expansion of a reportedly 'voluntary' resettlement programme, which is contested, by affected communities and civil society, as not being voluntary in practice.

30. The Letter requested the Government to provide detailed information on the policies and measures concerning the management of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and any relocation plans, publish the reports of the two February 2025 Presidential Commissions and clarify the measures ensuring that any resettlement is voluntary and compliant with applicable standards and lastly to outline safeguards to prevent forced displacement and ensure the protection and effective participation of affected communities.

- **Letter of Urgent Appeal to Zambia**

31. On 12 May 2025, a Letter of Urgent Appeal was transmitted to the Government of Zambia in my joint capacity as the Country Rapporteur for the Human Rights Situation in the Republic of Zambia and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, regarding the postponement and subsequent cancellation of the 'RightsCon Global Summit 2026,' which was scheduled to take place in Lusaka, Zambia, from 05 to 08 May 2026. Reportedly, this action was necessitated by the need for comprehensive disclosure of critical information relating to key thematic issues proposed for discussion during the Summit, which was essential to ensure full alignment with Zambia's national values, policy priorities, and broader public interest considerations.

32. The Letter highlighted that the convening provided a useful opportunity for various stakeholders to come together to discuss critical issues related to human rights, including freedom of expression, access to information and the realization and governance of digital rights. Further, the action contributed to shrinking the civic space, stifled free speech and expression and sent the wrong signal on the suppression of expression during the crucial election year for Zambia in 2026.

PRESS STATEMENTS

Press release on the human rights situation in the United Republic of Tanzania

33. On 01 November 2025, a Press Statement was issued in response to the human rights situation in the Tanzania following the general elections of 29 October 2025. The Commission noted its extreme concern regarding the reports on widespread turmoil following a series of post-election protests, which reportedly left hundreds of people dead and injured following clashes with security forces, in addition to the nationwide internet shutdown which made it difficult to confirm the actual death toll. The Commission condemned the reports on the deteriorating human rights situation and called on the Government of Tanzania to prioritise de-escalating the prevailing situation, in addition to ensuring that security forces refrained from

using disproportionate force against protestors. Further, the Commission called on the Government to urgently initiate investigations on the reports.

IV. Development of the African Guidelines on Promoting and Harnessing Data Access as a Tool for Advancing Human Rights and Sustainable Development in the Digital Age

34. The increasing use of digital technology has significantly altered the ways in which we access information in recent years. Access to information refers to the right of individuals to obtain information held by public bodies and relevant private bodies and is rooted in human rights law including Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Access to data extends the principle of access to information in the digital age, ensuring access not only documents but also datasets, metadata, and digital resources which are openly available, usable, and shareable.
35. In view of the fact that access to information and access to data reinforce each other, given that access to information promotes transparency while access to data enables deeper analysis, participation, and evidence-based decision-making, the Commission adopted **Resolution 620 on Promoting and Harnessing Data Access as a Tool for Advancing Human Rights and Sustainable Development in the Digital Age**, during its 81st Ordinary Session, held in Banjul, The Gambia, from 17 October to 06 November 2024. This Resolution, *inter alia*, noted the rapid advancement of technology and the growing reliance on data in governance, economic development, and social interaction across the African continent, and highlighted that harnessing the power of data, particularly in the digital age, can promote democracy and facilitate the exercise of various human rights, while ensuring transparency and accountability in governance.
36. In addition, the Resolution mandated the Commission's mechanism on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa, to develop appropriate normative standards with the view to guiding data collection and deployment and addressing access issues concerning data. It is in this regard, that I have worked with various stakeholders to develop the **African Guidelines on Promoting and Harnessing Data Access as a Tool for Advancing Human Rights and Sustainable Development in the Digital Age**.
37. Overall, the Guidelines provide a human rights-based framework for balancing privacy, access and innovation, while fostering accountability, equity, and sustainable digital transformation across Africa, building on the Commission's soft law documents on Article 9 of the African Charter. Key principles of the draft Guidelines include, *inter alia*, maximum disclosure of public and relevant private data, data justice and equity for marginalized communities, the importance of data for public accountability, in addition to prioritizing systems for data collection, storage and dissemination built with proactive disclosure features, accessibility

standards and interoperability by default, and security provisions. In addition, the Guidelines stress the importance of access to platform-held data for public interest research and the need for inclusive, affordable, multilingual access strategies, among others. Further, in terms of measures, the draft Guidelines call on States to establish robust national frameworks for data governance, domesticate the **African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection** and the **African Union Data Policy Framework**, in addition to implementing open data policies.

38. With the view to ensuring a participatory process in the development of these draft Guidelines, a Call for Contributions was issued on the Commission's website, on 15 April 2026, which invited stakeholders, including State actors, non-State actors, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organizations, in addition to the Commission's partners, to forward their inputs on the draft Guidelines to the Commission by close of business on 14 July 2026. The draft Guidelines can be accessed on the Commission's website in English, French and Portuguese.²
39. I would like to take this opportunity to call on all interested stakeholders to work with the Commission to develop these Guidelines, by submitting feedback, comments and proposed amendments to the draft document, in order to enrich the proposed Guidelines and ensure that the normative document which will eventually be adopted by the Commission, takes into account all relevant views in the final document.

² **English** - <https://achpr.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2026-04-15/call-contribution-african-guidelines-promoting-and-harnessing-data>

French - <https://achpr.au.int/fr/news/communique-de-presse/2026-04-15/call-contribution-african-guidelines-promoting-and-harnessing>

Portuguese - <https://achpr.au.int/pt/news/press-releases/2026-04-15/call-contribution-african-guidelines-promoting-and-harnessing-data>

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

40. In conclusion, I wish to propose the following conclusions and recommendations:

To all stakeholders:

- i. In view of the call for contributions to the **African Guidelines on Promoting and Harnessing Data Access as a Tool for Advancing Human Rights and Sustainable Development in the Digital Age**, submit comments, proposed amendments and other general information, to ensure that the draft guidelines take into consideration all relevant issues and are adopted following a participatory engagement process in accordance with the Commission's established practices.
- ii. Contribute to development of Guidelines to assist States monitor technology companies in respect of their duty to maintain information integrity through independent fact checking as per Resolution 630 which was adopted by the Commission in 2025. In this regard, I am being supported by Moxxi (formerly MMA), and contributions to this important document can be submitted to the Commission via its official email address.
- iii. Contribute to the development of Guidelines on the assessment of public interest content in this digital era for all platforms operating in Africa as per Resolution 631 which was adopted by the Commission in 2025. In this regard, I am being supported in this by SOS Coalition , and contributions can also be submitted to the Commission via its official email address.

States Parties:

- iv. Sign, ratify and domesticate the **African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection**.
- v. Welcoming the response from the Governments of Algeria and Egypt to the Joint Letter of Appeal and the clarification provided regarding the reported arrest and judicial harassment of Mr. Ahmed Douma.
- vi. Respond to Letters of Appeal from the Special Rapporteur and other special mechanisms, providing clarification on reported violations of freedom of expression and access to information, particularly with regard to arrests and detention of journalists, human rights defenders, among others, as highlighted in the report.

- vii. Refrain from restricting access to the internet and social media platforms at all times but particularly before, during and after elections, ensuring the free flow of information and free expression.
- viii. In accordance with **Resolution 654 on the Promotion and Protection of Artistic Freedom in Africa**, which was adopted in view of the Commission's concern regarding reports of censorship, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and other forms of repression targeting artists, cultural professionals, creative content creators and disseminators of artistic creativity on the continent, I call on States *inter alia* to respect, protect and promote the right to artistic freedom of expression and ensure that creators and disseminators of artistic creativity are protected from arbitrary actions in response to the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of expression.
- ix. In accordance with **Resolution 657 on Access to Information and the Right to a Healthy Environment**, adopted in view of the importance of accurate and reliable information, in addition to transparency, participation and accountability as necessary tools to address environmental harm and promote resilience, I call on States to ensure timely, accurate, accessible and proactive disclosure of climate and environmental information, and to guarantee meaningful public participation and access to justice in environmental decision-making, as integral components of environmental protection and sustainable development.

To NHRIs and NGOs:

- x. In view of the increasing submission of State Periodic Reports, I call on NHRIs and NGOs to consistently submit timely shadow reports in accordance with Rule 79 of the Commission's Rules of Procedure (2020), highlighting the situation relating to the rights of free expression and access to information in the various State Parties, in order to ensure that the Commission and the special mechanisms are informed of the current human rights situation, which will undoubtedly contribute to a productive engagement on the relevant State Reports.

I thank you for your attention.