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## Amnesty International Report 2021/22; The State of the World's Human Rights; Togo 2021

The right to freedom of expression was violated; sanctions were imposed on media outlets. A draft freedom of association bill threatened to violate human rights. Detainees suffered overcrowding. Health workers denounced violations of the right to health. Discrimination including violence against women continued.

### Freedom of expression

Several cases of judicial harassment against journalists, media outlets and activists were reported.

On 3 February, three journalists were arrested for interviewing a local authority chief perceived to be critical of the government. They were released the same day.

On 9 March, *L'Alternative* newspaper was suspended for four months, after the Supreme Court's administrative chamber upheld the suspension imposed in February by the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HAAC). The sanction followed a complaint by a minister regarding an article which alleged that he falsified documents.

The administrative chamber also upheld a January HAAC decision to order *L'Indépendant Express* newspaper to cease all activities after it reported on an alleged theft by two ministers. The HAAC decision said the article "seriously violated rules of professional conduct and ethics".

On 27 August, Paul Missiagbeto, special adviser to government opponent and former presidential contender Agbényom Messan Kodjo, was sentenced to 48 months in prison, 24 of which were suspended, by the Court of First Instance of Lomé, for "death threats, insults against representatives of public authority, and dissemination of false news". He

had sent WhatsApp messages saying, among other things, “Faure Gnassingbé will have a tragic end if he does not act quickly to hand over power to the real winner”, and claiming that Agbéyom Messan Kodjo was the real winner of the 2020 presidential election.

On 9 December the Supreme Court overturned an HAAC decision to suspend *La Symphonie* newspaper for two months, after it criticized an HAAC sanction against The Guardian newspaper.

Ferdinand Ayité, editor of *L'Alternative*, and Joël Egah, editor of *Fraternité* were detained on 10 December for contempt of public officials, and “dissemination of false news”, according to their lawyer, after journalists criticized two ministers during broadcasting. They were provisionally released on 31 December and the presenter, Isidore Kouwonou, was placed under judicial supervision.

On 11 December activist Fovi Katakou, a known government critic, was arrested and charged with “incitement to revolt against the authority of the state”, among other things. He was provisionally released on 20 December and placed under judicial supervision.

## Mass surveillance

A major investigation into the leak of 50,000 phone numbers of potential surveillance targets of Pegasus spyware, revealed more than 300 Togolese phone numbers on the list. Numbers included those belonging to activists, political opponents and journalists – including Ferdinand Ayité – who were potential targets for surveillance by the authorities.

## Freedom of association

On 26 July, the authorities announced the suspension until further notice of the granting and renewal of NGO licences in order to “update the regulatory framework” and “strengthen the results of NGO interventions by aligning them with government priorities”. For the first time since 2012, the Ministry of Territorial Administration did not renew the licence of the Association of Victims of Torture in Togo.

In August, four UN Special Rapporteurs wrote to the authorities expressing concern about provisions in a freedom of association bill which violated international human rights standards.

## Torture and other ill-treatment

Yakoubou Abdoul-Moutawakilou, secretary general of the Pan African National Party, Kpalimé section, died on 26 August a month after he was temporarily released from Lomé prison for health reasons. Arrested in January 2020 and detained until July 2021, he was accused of attempting

to conspire against state interior security in the “Tiger Revolution” case, in which dozens of people were arrested and accused of destabilizing state institutions in the context of the presidential elections. In 2020, at least four of them died after being transferred from Lomé prison to healthcare facilities. The Committee for the Release of All Political Prisoners denounced the ill-treatment of detainees in this case.

In May, there were 4,906 people held in 14 prisons which had a capacity for 2,886; 2,762 of them were pre-trial detainees.

## Women’s rights

In July, the UN Human Rights Committee adopted its concluding observations on Togo’s fifth periodic report, noting that several national laws still contained provisions which discriminated against women; a lack of measures – particularly in terms of protection – to allow rape victims access to justice without fear of discrimination, stigmatization or reprisals; and the continued use of female genital mutilation despite its being criminalized.

## Right to health

### Workers’ rights

In September, health unions organized a sit-in in several cities to denounce the dysfunctional health system in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. They highlighted the lack of medical staff in intensive care units, insufficient Covid-19 care centres, the shortage of scanners and other medical equipment, as well as health workers’ unpaid salaries.

## Right to social security

On 12 October, Parliament adopted a law establishing universal health insurance, with the stated purpose of ensuring access to quality healthcare for everyone.

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