

Ghana

The president declined to sign into law a bill passed in parliament to proscribe accusations of witchcraft. A bill to further criminalize LGBTI people progressed in parliament. A partial abolition of the death penalty was revoked. The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continued to be threatened, and authorities used excessive force to disperse protests. The right to health of pregnant women was threatened by lack of access to medical facilities. Environmental activists decried the pollution generated by second-hand clothing imports.

Background

The year was marked by high costs of living and food inflation amid growing national debt. In May, the International Monetary Fund approved a three-year, USD 3 billion programme for Ghana with an immediate disbursement of USD 600 million. The rest was contingent on Ghana following through with commitments to restructure its domestic and external debts, cut spending and make fiscal adjustments, thus raising concerns about potential impacts on economic and social rights. The inflation rate reached 53.6% in January but fell to 26.4% in November. In October, the World Bank's food security update ranked Ghana among 10 countries with the highest food inflation.

In July, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, cautioned Ghana over its non-refoulement obligation after the government repatriated more than 500 Burkinabe people to Burkina Faso.

Women's and girls' rights

Female genital mutilation (FGM) continued to be practised but there was progress in changing attitudes. In April, 15 former "female circumcisers" in Wa renounced FGM while traditional leaders in the city denounced and committed to help combat the practice.

On 3 July, Tamale High Court condemned two women to 12 years in prison for the 2020 manslaughter of a 90-year-old woman accused of witchcraft. On 27 July, the parliament passed a law making it a crime to accuse someone of witchcraft and requiring the dismantling of "witch camps" for accused women banished or fleeing from their villages. In December, the president declined to sign the bill into law, citing procedural issues.

On 31 October, the Affirmative Action bill aimed at increasing the participation of women in public office had its first official reading in parliament, having first been introduced in 2016. The bill was still pending at the end of year.

LGBTI peoples' rights

On 7 July, the parliament unanimously approved the 2021 Promotion of Appropriate Sexual Rights and Family Values bill during its second reading, taking it one step further to becoming law. The bill further criminalized LGBTI people and introduced prison sentences for anyone expressing support or "sympathy" towards LGBTI people. LGBTI rights activists expressed concerns over their safety should the bill be passed. In the same month, the Supreme Court dismissed a legal challenge to block parliament from passing the bill.

Death penalty

On 25 July, the parliament voted to remove the death penalty from the 1960 Criminal and Other Offences Act and the 1962 Armed Forces Act.¹ The president assented to the amendments the following month, making them law. In December, however, he revoked the changes, citing procedural issues. The constitution also continued to provide for the death penalty for high treason.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Four years after the murder of Ghanaian investigative journalist Ahmed Divila, the investigation was ongoing, and no one had been brought to justice.

In April, a coalition of media associations asked for a repeal of Section 76 of the Electronic Communications Act and Section 208 of the Criminal and Other Offences Act, arguing that these laws had been “weaponized” to arrest several journalists and restrict the right to freedom of expression. Reporters Without Borders ranked Ghana 62nd among the 180 countries surveyed in its 2023 World Press Freedom Index, down two places from 2022.

In September, the police filed an injunction to prevent a planned protest over the high cost of living taking place, from 21 to 23 September, outside the presidential palace in the capital, Accra. The police arrested at least 49 protesters for unlawful assembly when the protest went ahead on 21 September, releasing them on bail the same day.

Excessive use of force

On 7 March, in Ashaiman, the military used excessive force, including beating and kicking people, while investigating the murder of one of their colleagues. During the operation, Ghana Armed Forces detained 184 people. The deputy defence minister apologized that innocent people were caught up in the operation. Parliament’s Committee on Defence and the Interior stated that it had conducted investigations but, at the end of the year, no report had been published.

Right to health

In February, the Ghana Health Service revealed that 27 pregnant women in Bawku municipality had died between 2021 and 2022 due to their inability to access medical services. While some were unable to get to the hospital in time, others died due to staff shortages.

In April, Ghana became the first country to approve a malaria vaccine developed by Oxford University.

Right to a healthy environment

Environmental activists warned that the government’s plan to import liquefied natural gas under a 17-year agreement would lead to more use of carbon and delay the transition to cleaner energy.

Environmental activists, clothes traders and fishermen denounced the pollution created by used textiles coming into the country from abroad. Fast fashion clothes donated from overseas continued to find their way to second-hand markets such as Kantamanto in Accra, with huge volumes then being discarded as waste due to poor quality and ending up on the beaches of Accra and in the Odaw river, the Korle Lagoon or the sea.
