

Tanzania Authorities Arrest Opposition Politicians

Expanding Crackdown on Free Expression, Peaceful Assembly



[Click to expand Image](#)

Tanzanian police officers patrol the streets ahead of a demonstration over the alleged kidnapping and killing of opposition party members, Dar es Salaam, September 23, 2024. © 2024 Alinanuswe Mwanguku/AFP via Getty Images

Tanzania authorities have arrested leading opposition politicians who had planned to demonstrate in response to a wave of enforced disappearances of party officials.

On September 23, police [arrested](#) and later released on bail Freeman Mbowe, the chairman of the Chama Cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (Chadema) party; Tundu Lissu, Mbowe's deputy and former presidential candidate; and several other party members. Chadema [planned](#) the rally in Dar es Salaam to protest the government's alleged inaction following the abduction of at least five people affiliated with their party. The police had previously [banned](#) the demonstrations, threatening to "deal with" people who did not comply with their order.

Those disappeared are [Dioniz Kipanya](#), a Chadema party official who went missing in July, and [Deusdedith Soka](#), Jacob Godwin Mlay, and Frank Mbiye, whom unidentified men reportedly abducted on August 18. The whereabouts of all four remain unknown. Chadema has also called for investigations into the killing of [Ali Mohamed Kibao](#), a party official who went missing and whose beaten body was found doused with acid in September.

The arbitrary arrests of opposition leaders, their supporters, and government critics, are reminiscent of the presidency of John Magufuli, whose government wrongfully arrested dozens of opposition leaders and supporters ahead of the [2020 elections](#).

Since taking office after Magufuli's death in 2021, President Samia Suluhu Hassan has made some human rights improvements in Tanzania. Nevertheless, these latest arrests and other restrictions on free expression and peaceful assembly have raised human rights concerns in the country.

The authorities have recently harassed, threatened, and arrested critics of [government contracts](#) and the government's forcible [relocation of Indigenous Maasai people](#) from their ancestral lands in Ngorongoro, Arusha region. In August, police [arbitrarily arrested](#) hundreds of opposition supporters and several journalists ahead of a planned youth day celebration.

The government has also imposed restrictions on access to the social media platform X (formally known as Twitter), the global internet freedoms monitor [Netblocks reported](#) in early September.

Tanzania is scheduled to hold local elections in November and a general election in 2025. Rather than stifling freedom of expression and assembly, President Hassan should urgently address the legitimate concerns of the demonstrators, including the whereabouts of the disappeared party officials, and stem the tide of repression.