

The State of the World's Human Rights; Togo 2024

The authorities brutally repressed the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Multiple protests against changes to the constitution were unduly banned. Newspapers were suspended and political activists and members of NGOs were arbitrarily arrested. Measures were taken to improve healthcare provision.

Background

On 19 April the parliament adopted a new constitution transforming the presidential system into a parliamentary one, sparking fears that it was designed to keep President Gnassingbe – already in his fourth term – in power. A state of emergency was maintained in the northern Savanes region, neighbouring Burkina Faso, where attacks by armed groups continued.

Freedom of expression and right to information

Reporters Without Borders revealed in January that Togolese authorities had repeatedly used spyware on the mobile phones of two journalists who were charged with defamation.

Journalist Apollinaire Mewenemesse, editor-in-chief of *La Dépêche* newspaper, was arrested and detained on 26 March after publishing an article that raised questions about the assassination of an army officer in 2020. On 9 April a court in the capital, Lomé released him provisionally, placing him under judicial supervision and confiscating his passport. He was charged with seven counts, including “conceiving and publishing false news with the aim of inciting the population or the army to rise up against the State” and “undermining the honour, dignity and consideration of the President of the Republic”.

On 15 April the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC) suspended the accreditations of all foreign journalists for the coverage of the April legislative and regional elections, citing “problems” linked to the arrival of one French journalist and “serious failings” in political reporting about Togo by French media. The journalist was deported the following day after receiving a six-month suspended prison sentence for “illegal entry” into Togo.

In May, two young people received six-month suspended prison sentences for posting on TikTok to express concern over the change to the constitution.

Also in May the HAAC threatened to suspend Radio France Internationale (RFI) from broadcasting due to “unfair treatment of information and broadcasting of false news about Togo.” In June the French news channel France 24 received a “final warning” on the same grounds after it reported on staff shortages and other problems at the Sylvanus Olympio University Hospital Center in Lomé.

In July the HAAC suspended the “Auditeur-Actualité” programme on Victoire FM radio for three months after comments made by lawyer and politician François Boko, vice-president of the Freedom Togo-MLN movement, about the security situation in the country.

Arbitrary arrests and detention

In April, nine members of the opposition coalition Dynamique Monseigneur Kpodzro (DMK) were arbitrarily arrested on charges of “aggravated disturbance of public order”. Four had been about to carry out a publicity action in protest at the constitutional change. The other five were attending a political meeting at the home of a DMK activist. They were all released on 9 April by a Lomé court.

In September, four members of the international NGO Tournons La Page (“Let’s Turn the Page”), who had represented Togo and Benin at the third West African Citizens’ Summit on good governance, alternation and democracy held in Ghana, were arrested on their return to Lomé by plainclothes men claiming to be from the gendarmerie. They were taken to an unknown location but freed hours later without charge.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 27 March, at least three planned press conferences and meetings bringing together political parties and civil society organizations to discuss their concerns over the constitutional change were banned in Lomé and Tsévié and dispersed by security forces. The Ministry of Territorial Administration banned three demonstrations against the reforms planned for 11, 12 and 13 April. The same ministry sent a letter to two representatives of the DMK coalition notifying them that their planned sit-in on 25 April was banned on the grounds that the request had been “signed by two people instead of three”.¹

In September the Ministry of Territorial Administration banned a gathering by the campaign coalition “Don’t Touch my Constitution” in support of detainees, citing public order concerns.

Also in September a conference organized by the opposition African Peoples’ Democratic Convention and attended by a Senegalese member of the ECOWAS parliament was violently disrupted by a group of people throwing objects at the audience and podium. According to witnesses, security forces who were present failed to intervene.²

Economic, social and cultural rights

The ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled in July that Togo must pay damages to teachers unduly dismissed or suspended in 2022 for taking part in strike action.

Right to health

Some 60 health centres redeveloped or built in Savanes region were officially operational in January. The authorities recruited at least 2,500 health professionals. They also awarded a special bonus to paramedical staff in June following a broadcast by France 24 on problems in the maternal health department of Lomé University Hospital.
