

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

Background

In January, six people, including three soldiers, were sentenced to death for an attempted coup in 2021. The constitution still allowed the death penalty for high treason.

Consumer inflation, having fallen well below the hyperinflation seen in 2023, was still high, at 23.8% in December. In October, international bond-holders agreed to reduce Ghana's USD 13 billion debt by 37%. There were frequent power cuts due to a gas shortage.

John Dramani Mahama won the presidential elections held in December.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Ghana improved its ranking in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters without Borders, ranking 50th out of 180 countries surveyed, up 12 places from 2023. However, high levels of intimidation and violence against journalists continued.

In January a journalist was physically assaulted by a ruling party member of parliament and his supporters during the party's parliamentary primaries in Yendi, ahead of the general elections due in December. In May the Ghana Journalists Association called on all politicians to condemn attacks on journalists after another journalist was physically assaulted by supporters of the ruling party in the city of Tamale while covering political events.

In July a planned protest in the capital city, Accra, to demand government action on the cost-of-living crisis was banned at the request of the police, who cited lack of personnel available to provide security. In September over 50 people were arrested during protests in Accra against allegations of corruption linked to illegal mining. They were all subsequently released but, at the end of the year, 31 were still facing various charges including unlawful assembly, causing unlawful damage and "offensive conduct conducive to breaches of peace".

Women's and girls' rights

Women's and girls' rights continued to be threatened. In April, activists condemned the marriage of a 12-year-old girl to a priest. The girl was put under police protection but no arrests were made.

Also in April, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice organized a dialogue with 25 stakeholders, including governmental officials, which called for the president to sign into law a bill criminalizing accusations of witchcraft; the bill had been passed by parliament in 2023. Hundreds of accused women in the northern and north-east regions remained in "witch camps" they had fled to after being rejected from their communities.

The Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Bill to increase the participation of women in public life was passed in parliament in July and signed into law by the president in September. The new law aimed to

increase women's participation to 30% by 2026 and 50% by 2030.

LGBTI people's rights

LGBTI people's rights were further undermined. In February, parliament passed the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, which further criminalized LGTBI people and introduced prison sentences for anyone advocating for LGBTI rights. In March the president stated that he would await a decision by the Supreme Court on the legal challenges to the bill before deciding whether to sign it. In December The Supreme Court dismissed the two legal challenges to the bill stating that it could not review it since it was not yet an act. By the end of the year, the president had not signed the bill into law.

In July, rejecting a constitutional challenge over breaches of the right to privacy, the Supreme Court upheld section 104 of the Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29), including the criminalization of “unnatural carnal knowledge”. This was interpreted to include consensual same-sex sexual relations.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Food prices continued to be high, threatening the right to food and health. In July a BBC news report suggested that young people were budgeting by eating less protein and fewer meals. Food inflation peaked at 29.6% in March.

There was progress in fighting malaria. In April the World Health Organization reported that over 700,000 children in seven regions had been vaccinated as of September 2023, and that the prevalence of malaria in children less than five years old had gone from 20.6% in 2016 to 8.6% in 2023. The WHO also reported that in-patient malaria deaths had dropped from 428 in 2018 to 155 in 2022.

In September, UNICEF reported that Ghana had administered 1 million doses of malaria vaccine since 2019, significantly reducing cases of severe malaria, and announced the expansion of the vaccine roll-out to a further 125 districts between 2025 and 2029.

Right to a healthy environment

Illegal mining and illegal logging had disastrous environmental impacts.

According to data updated in 2024 by the online platform Global Forest Watch, Ghana lost 1.64 million hectares of tree cover from 2001 to 2023, a 24% decrease compared to 2000. The platform recorded 5,170 deforestation alerts in a single week in October.

The price of cocoa continued to soar because of falling harvests from land that cocoa producers claimed had been destroyed by illegal small-scale mining – known as *galamsey* – as well as climate change. In March alone, prices increased by at least 60%. In addition, Ghana's cocoa industry regulator reported that 500,000 hectares were infected with cacao swollen shoot disease, which may have been exacerbated by deforestation and climate change.

In April, in recognition of the damage caused to livelihoods, the government announced a 50% rise in the price paid to cocoa farmers. However, the farmers protested that the rise was insufficient given the price of cocoa on the international market.

In October, activists denounced the effects of illegal mining on rivers after a report published by Ghana Water Company found that 60% of watercourses were too polluted to be treated. The activists called on the government to suspend mining contracts and do more to stop illegal mining.

Used textiles from the fast fashion industry continued to come into the country from abroad and find their way into second-hand markets, such as Kantamanto in Accra, before being dumped due to poor quality. Large volumes continued to wash up on beaches and to pollute rivers, lagoons and the sea.