

Human Rights Issues in Tanzania Amid the 2025 Election Year



As Tanzania enters a crucial election year, the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) extends warm New Year wishes to all members, partners, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), and stakeholders committed to promoting and protecting human rights. THRDC is pleased to announce the reopening of its office on January 9th after the holiday season. As we usher in 2025, we reaffirm our commitment to working collaboratively to ensure a safer and more just society for all. This year brings with it not only opportunities to strengthen democratic principles but also challenges that require

vigilance and collaboration. Tanzania has 19 registered political parties, yet as the election season unfolds, there is growing concern over the unequal participation of these parties in political activities such as meetings and party leadership elections.

Reflections on 2024 Human Rights Violations

The year 2024 saw a disturbing number of cases in abductions and attacks targeting human rights defenders, activists, and political figures. THRDC documented 48 cases of abductions and attacks targeting human rights defenders, activists, politicians, children with albinism, and other individuals across Tanzania. These incidents include abductions, violent assaults, and extrajudicial killings, with some victims remaining missing to date. Among the most alarming cases was the abduction of Deusdedith Soka, Jacob Mlay and Frank Mbise, whereby Soka was a vocal activist, all of whom were forcefully taken, held in undisclosed locations, and subjected to extreme intimidation. Ms. Christina Kibiki the Secretary of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) for Kilolo District who was attacked and tragically shot dead by unidentified people. These abductions and killings sent shockwaves through Tanzanian society, reinforcing fears of political retaliation and state repression.

However, the pattern of violence in 2024 against opposition members is deeply troubling. Aisha Machano, another CHADEMA leader, was abducted and tortured before being abandoned in a forest. Her ordeal mirrors that of other victims, fueling anxiety among opposition supporters. The recurrence of such incidents suggests systemic challenges to safeguarding political freedoms and ensuring justice for victims. The arrests of eight prominent members of CHADEMA, the leading opposition party, including its chairman Freeman Mbowe and deputy chair Tundu Lissu, have sparked nationwide and international criticism. These detentions came as the party prepared to stage peaceful demonstrations against the abduction and murder of party members. One such incident involved the brutal killing of Ali Mohamed Kibao, whose death highlighted growing fears of political violence

and suppression.

The government's justification for banning the protests, citing security concerns, has raised questions about the balance between maintaining order and upholding democratic freedoms. We, human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have called for impartial investigations and the release of those arbitrarily detained.

As we enter the 2025 election period, THRDC urges all stakeholder's government authorities, security agencies, and political parties to ensure that such grave violations do not happen again. The safety of all citizens, regardless of their political affiliations or advocacy roles, must be prioritized. No individual should be silent through fear, and no family should have to endure the pain of a disappearing loved one. Tanzania must take deliberate steps to prevent history from repeating itself by fostering a political environment where differences are settled through dialogue, not violence.

Media Restrictions and Freedom of Expression

The Tanzanian government's restrictions on media outlets and social platforms have exacerbated the human rights situation. Since mid-2024, the arrest of opposition supporters, coupled with the suspension of independent media, has undermined the principles of free expression. As the elections draw closer, ensuring transparency and safeguarding media freedoms must be prioritized to foster a climate of trust and accountability.

Indigenous Communities Under Threat

Beyond political issues, indigenous Maasai communities have faced displacement threats under the guise of conservation. Over 40,000 Maasai people protested a government directive to relocate them from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, a move that would not only uproot their lives but also disenfranchise them from participating in the upcoming elections. While the High Court in Arusha has temporarily halted the evictions, the Maasai's struggle underscores the broader challenges faced by marginalized groups in asserting their rights.

CCM's Strategic Meetings: Setting the Stage for 2025

As Tanzania gears up for the 2025 general elections, the ruling party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) has intensified its preparations to shape the nation's political direction. This January 2025, CCM held their General Meeting in Dodoma, bringing together party leaders and stakeholders to deliberate on pressing national issues, including economic reforms, unemployment, and social cohesion. The meeting highlighted the party's focus on strengthening Tanzania's economic resilience, with initiatives aimed at empowering small and medium enterprises, advancing infrastructure projects, and ensuring equitable resource distribution. These priorities reflect CCM's commitment to addressing the everyday challenges of Tanzanians while reinforcing its image as a party of stability and development.

The meeting also underscored CCM's dedication to fostering unity and maintaining peace during the election period. President Samia Suluhu Hassan urged party members to lead by example, promoting fairness, transparency, and accountability throughout the electoral process. Analysts note that CCM's strategies during this period will have far-reaching

implications, shaping not only voter confidence but also the broader political and human rights environment in the country.

CCM's dominance and resource advantage grants significant influence, but critics question whether this ensures a fair playing field for all political actors. The ruling party must balance its development agenda with inclusivity, fostering cooperation, engaging opposition constructively, and upholding democratic freedoms. Its actions in the coming months will be crucial in shaping the credibility of the 2025 elections and Tanzania's democratic commitment.

CHADEMA: Leading by Example in Democracy

One shining example of democratic practice in Tanzania is Chama cha Demokrasia Maendeleo (CHADEMA), which has been proactive in engaging its members and leaders to prepare for the 2025 elections. In this January 2025, CHADEMA held a significant meeting to elect new leaders and discuss its roadmap for the elections. The process was highly transparent and inclusive, with party members participating in selecting leaders democratically. This has been lauded as a commendable approach, emphasizing accountability and representation.

However, this vibrant display of democracy stands in stark contrast to other political parties that have yet to hold similar meetings or engage their members in meaningful ways. As Tanzania moves closer to the elections, it is crucial for all political parties to take the initiative to engage their members, plan strategically, and ensure they represent the voices of the citizens they seek to serve. THRDC urges other parties to follow CHADEMA's example by fostering transparency, inclusivity, and active participation.

Looking Ahead

As Tanzania navigates its 2025 election year, THRDC emphasizes the importance of unity, safety, and cooperation among all stakeholders. We urge the government, law enforcement agencies, and other security departments to work collaboratively with human rights organizations to ensure a peaceful and fair electoral process. By respecting freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, Tanzania can set an example for democratic governance in the region.

To our members, partners and fellow human rights defenders, we extend our heartfelt wishes for a safe and prosperous year ahead. Let us remain vigilant and committed to protecting the rights and dignity of all Tanzanians. Together, we can build a nation where democracy and justice thrive.

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