

STATEMENT ON THE UPR PRE-SESSION 51 ON THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA (DIGITAL RIGHTS)

27 NOVEMBER 2025, GENEVA – SWITZERLAND.



Submitting Organisations

- The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).
- Statement is informed by a desk review and inputs gathered during a stakeholder consultation on digital rights in Rwanda.
- It further draws from a separate but complementary submission jointly made by CIPESA and the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU).



Status of previous recommendations on Digital Rights

- Rwanda received 32 recommendations on freedom of expression in 2021.
- Several states including Germany, Norway, Canada, and Ireland urged Rwanda to end journalist harassment, reform restrictive laws, and improve digital inclusion for women.
- Rwanda supported most recommendations, but progress remains limited.



Overview of digital rights thematic

Today, I will address four core digital rights themes:

1. Freedom of expression.
2. Surveillance and privacy.
3. The gender digital divide.
4. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).



Issue 1:

Restrictive legal framework on freedom of expression

- Repeal provisions that unduly criminalise free speech, including articles 157, 164, 194, 233 and 253 of the 2018 Penal Code, and amend the 2018 Cybercrime Law to ensure that all provisions comply with international human rights standards relating to free speech and expression.
- Withdraw all cases against individuals facing harassment, intimidation and prosecution from state authorities for legitimate expression of dissent against the government.

Issue 2: Institutionalised surveillance and lack of independent oversight

- Refrain from using or cease the use of artificial intelligence applications and spyware, in cases where it is impossible for them to operate in compliance with international human rights law or where they pose undue risks to the enjoyment of human rights, unless and until the adequate safeguards to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms are in place.
- Guarantee adequate independent oversight mechanisms to ensure state surveillance practices are limited and proportional in accordance with international human rights standards.

Issue 3: Persistent gender digital divide

- Ensure that digital access is inclusive and equitable for all by removing access barriers for marginalised communities, including rural communities, women and persons with disabilities.

Issue 4: Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)

- Develop appropriate and effective accountability mechanisms for social media platforms and other tech companies, with a focus on ensuring company transparency and remediation to ensure that hate speech and TFGBV is appropriately addressed on their platforms.
- Provide redress and reparation as an effective, efficient and meaningful way of aiding victims of TFGBV and ensuring that justice is achieved.
- Enhance measures and policies to prohibit, investigate and prosecute TFGBV in line with international human rights standards.

Closing remarks

CIPESA and APC urges the Republic of Rwanda to prioritise rights-respecting reforms that guarantee free expression, privacy, digital inclusion, and the protection of women online.

Addressing these concerns is essential to achieving SDGs 5 and 16 and ensuring a safe, open, and inclusive digital society.

Thank you.

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