Statement on the UPR Pre-session on
Tanzania of Change Africa Trust

August 26, 2026, Geneva

Torture, Repression of human rights defenders, restrictions on civic space, transnational repression

INTRODUCTION

This statement is delivered on behalf of Change Africa Trust, a non-governmental organization in East Africa that seeks to uphold people's rights.

Change Africa Trust unites civil rights activists across Eastern Africa to strengthen human rights and democracy. It focuses on promoting values, supporting democracy, defending human rights, increasing political engagement, good governance, emphasizing citizens' duties and responsibilities, monitoring accountability, and campaigning for economic fairness.

This submission examines patterns of torture and ill-treatment, repression of human rights defenders (HRDs), restrictions on civic space, and emerging practices of transnational repression in Tanzania. It draws on civil society documentation and first-hand testimony from a Tanzanian HRD in exile. The evidence indicates a systemic pattern of repression in which restrictive legal frameworks, abusive policing practices, arbitrary detention, and cross-border intimidation reinforce one another.

Thematics

1. Torture
2. Repression of Human Rights defenders
3. Restrictions on civic space and Political parties
4. Transnational Repression

During its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2021, Tanzania accepted several recommendations relevant to the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, including commitments to improve access to justice, strengthen human rights training for law enforcement officials, and ensure prompt, impartial investigations into violations against journalists, civil society actors, and human rights defenders.

However, the Government only noted recommendations to ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, despite broad support from recommending States, indicating that these required further consultation. As of 2026, Tanzania remains among the few States globally, and one of only two in all of Africa, that have yet to ratify UNCAT, and has not completed ratification of ICPPED

ISSUE 1: Torture

Torture is well-normalized in security organs in Tanzania. In a 2024 Report, the Human Rights and Good Governance Commission in Tanzania verified multiple cases in which the police denied bail to detainees and subjected them to torture while in custody, the Commission handled 1,020 complaints and completed investigations into 230 complaints.[i] The Commission revealed that the police use specific sites as "torture chambers" before arrested or detained individuals are transferred to other police stations.

On May 19, 2025, security authorities arrested Ugandan activist Agather Atuhaire and Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi after they arrived in Tanzania to observe the Lissu trial. Both activists reported being held incommunicado by police who stripped them naked, beat them, and tortured them for four days before they were dumped at the borders of their respective countries.

Therefore, we recommend that the Tanzanian government:

Ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT), its Optional Protocol, complete the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and adopt implementation measures, including criminalizing torture in line with the UNCAT.

1. Ensure prompt, effective, and independent investigations into torture, enforced disappearance, unlawful killings, excessive force, and other human rights violations and ensure victims' participation in investigations and access to effective reparations.
2. Criminalize torture in line with CAT and ensure prompt, independent investigations into all allegations.

ISSUE 2 - Repression of Human Rights defenders

In 2024-2025, State repression escalated as the Government continued to target human rights defenders and those who spoke out in dissent ahead of

general elections.[ii] This escalation drew increasing international scrutiny. In June 2025, several UN experts called on the Government to “immediately stop the enforced disappearance of political opponents, human rights defenders and journalists, as a tool of repression in the electoral context”.[iii]

Social media activist Edgar Mwakabela "Sativa” was abducted from his home in Dar es Salaam on June 23, 2024, by individuals he identified as police officers. He was blindfolded, thrown in a vehicle, tortured, shot in the face, and left in Katavi National Park in Tanzania’s western region.[iv] Mwakabela’s abduction and torture took place shortly after he posted online in support of a traders' strike protesting actions by the Tanzanian Revenue Authority.

Despite UN calls in June 2025, violations persisted. In September 2025, Human Rights Watch documented 10 cases of politically motivated assault, harassment, abduction, and torture of activists.

Cases include:

the disappearance of opposition activist Mpaluka Nyagali (“Mdude”), who was abducted from his home in Mbeya and whose whereabouts remain unknown despite a *habeas corpus* filed by his wife, and the violent assault of Government critic Japhet Matarra, who was beaten with a metal bar by unidentified individuals until he lost consciousness. As Matarra awaited surgery in the hospital, he was attacked again by assailants posing as medical staff.[v] These incidents demonstrate that the State continues to target, abduct, and torture human rights defenders. The Chande Commission admitted that between 2021 and 2025, over 750 cases of enforced disappearances occurred!

RECOMMENDATION

1. End arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, torture, sexual violence and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearances and cross-border abductions, including of human rights defenders, activists, opposition members, lawyers, journalists, and others who dissent.
2. *Ending extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, illegal arrests and detention, torture, harassment, and other human rights violations, and taking all necessary measures to prevent them by enforcing the police guideline (PGOs) and reforming the police force as recommended by the Judge Chande* **Commission to Investigate Tanzania's Criminal Justice System**.
3. *Ending impunity, stopping police operations (Task forces) that target*

human rights defenders and civilians. And marked vehicles and police without uniforms

ISSUE 3 - Restrictions on civic and political space

In April 2025, the police arrested Tundu Lissu, the leader of CHADEMA, during a rally. He remains on trial on reportedly fabricated charges.

On April 23, 2025, police in Dar es Salaam arrested several CHADEMA members gathering at the Kisutu Resident Magistrate Court during the trial of Tundu Lissu. Later reported being harassed, beaten, and subjected to torture and ill-treatment before being dumped in remote areas approximately 43 km from Dar es Salaam. Two of those detained individuals also reported experiencing sexual assault during custody.

Internet shutdowns and other restrictions on expression

1. The Government imposed a nationwide internet shutdown beginning on Election Day in October 2025, which lasted for four days. multi-layered attack on the information ecosystem, predominantly by the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA). Slow internet and expensive data are currently restricting many Tanzanians from accessing information.
2. This limited access to information related to voting and the ensuing protests, and impeded communication among journalists and between civil society organizations and voters, as the authorities completely shut down public access to platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Live, Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and Telegram.
3. This was the third time the Tanzanian Government limited or completely shut down public access to the internet in the country in less than a year, despite blanket internet disruptions and shutdowns being incompatible with the right to freedom of expression, as recognized by international bodies.[vi]
4. Attack on social media, X formerly known as twitter is restricted in Tanzania and www.tanzaniamassacre.org . Telegram and Clubhouse need a VPN to access them, but use of VPN is illegal in Tanzania. Individual activists critics of the government, to name a few: Maria Sarungi and Mange Kimambi; Instagram and Facebook are restricted in Tanzania by Meta at the order of the Tanzanian government.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Refrain from internet shutdowns, blocking digital platforms, and other undue restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

2. Ensure law enforcement operations, including policing of assemblies and the use of equipment, comply with international human rights standards.
3. Ratify and implement the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) and adopt implementation measures to ensure free, fair, inclusive and transparent electoral processes.

ISSUE 4 : Transnational Repression

There is increasing evidence that repression extends beyond Tanzania's borders. OMCT and its partners reported cases involving arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and deportation of foreign activists, as well as the abduction and torture of individuals linked to Tanzania-related activism. On Abduction with Tanzania , Tanganyika Lawyers Association documented 83 cases since 2016, and LHRC documented 80 cases between October and December 2025 alone. Also the interview confirms patterns of transnational repression:

- HRDs in exile reported continued surveillance and tracking after relocation;
- Use of informal networks and local informants to identify their whereabouts; pressure exerted on family members to facilitate targeting or cooperation

The abduction on January 12, 2025, in the streets of Nairobi of Tanzanian human rights defender and media owner Maria Sarungi Tsehai, known for her bold critiques of government corruption and human rights abuses in Tanzania, is the highest illustration of Tanzania's transnational repression activities in East Africa.

On February 22, 2026, Mshabaha Hamza Mshabaha was the target of an attempted abduction in Machakos, which was foiled by Kenyan police, leading to the arrest of three suspects. The case of Mshabaha, associated with Change Africa Trust, illustrates patterns of repression against human rights defenders (HRDs) in Tanzania, including forced exile and transnational repression

RECOMMENDATION

1. Stop and refrain from all forms of transnational repression, including cross-border surveillance, intimidation, and coercion.
2. Guarantee safeguards for all persons deprived of liberty, including access to a lawyer and family, independent medical examinations, and detention records, and the exclusion of evidence obtained through torture or ill-treatment.
3. Cease harassment, intimidation, and prosecution of HRDs, journalists, and civil society actors.

NOTE

[i] The Chanzo Reporter, 'Justice, News Commission For Human Rights Reveals Some Police Stations In Tanzania Are Used As Torture Chambers For Suspects,' (The Chanzo Initiative, 19 July 2024), accessed 26 February 2026. https://thechanzo.com/2024/07/19/commission-for-human-rights-reveals-some-police-stations-in-tanzania-are-used-as-torture-chambers-for-suspects/

[ii] 'Unopposed, Unchecked, Unjust: 'Wave of Terror' Sweeps Tanzania Ahead of 2025 Vote ("Unopposed"),' (Amnesty International, October 2025), accessed 15 January 2026, 6.

[iii] United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Tanzania: UN experts alarmed by pattern of enforced disappearance and torture to silence opposition and critics' (Press Release, 13 June 2025), accessed 27 February 2026.

source 1 : VOA https://www.voanews.com/a/tanzanian-authorities-deny-rights-abuses-as-critics-keep-disappearing/7779552.html
source 2 : UN report 200 cases since 2019 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/tanzania-un-experts-alarmed-pattern-enforced-disappearance-and-torture
source 3 : LHRC https://humanrights.or.tz/en/news-events/2024_LHRC_Report_Launch
source 4 : BBC EYE state of fear https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/2026/bbc-africa-eye-state-of-fear

[iv] 'Unopposed, Unchecked, Unjust: 'Wave of Terror' Sweeps Tanzania Ahead of 2025 Vote' (Amnesty International, October 2025), accessed 15 January 2026, 10.

[v] 'Tanzania: Deepening Repression Threatens Elections,' (Human Rights Watch, 29 September 2025) accessed 15 January 2026.

[vi] 'UN: Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution on Human Rights on the Internet,' (Article 19, 15 July 2021) accessed 15 January 2026.