

Navigating Internet Freedom Challenges in East and Southern Africa

Date	Time	Location
July 23, 2021	10:00 am 11:45 am EAT	Zoom

Register: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84539540924?pwd=N1ppVUgxWEVIRWxHdzNMKzhEclBuZz09>

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Background

Digital rights in many African countries continue to be on the decline, and have in some instances been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Key challenges in the region include poor internet connectivity, proliferation of laws and regulations that undermine digital rights, network disruptions, unequal digital access, and continuous violation of citizens' digital rights, especially the right to privacy, access to information and freedom of expression by several governments and private actors.

Some governments are adopting draconian laws to curb the spread of "false news" and disinformation, which are used to crack down on the media, dissenting voices, and government critics. Most recently, Zambia passed the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act 2021, which has been criticised for undermining the protection, promotion and enjoyment of digital rights and freedoms. Meanwhile, the adoption of new communications regulations in Uganda, Tanzania, Lesotho increasingly raise fears about state regulators' regressive stance on internet freedoms.

The Uganda government recently introduced digital taxes at the expense of the rights of internet users - a move which Zambia has also toyed with. Uganda scrapped the much criticised "social media tax" only to replace it with a new 12% tax levy on internet data. The country further hits the bottom on the digital rights front with the most recent internet and social media shutdowns observed during the January 2021 general elections. Network disruptions have also been observed in Zimbabwe and Tanzania.

There is also growing concern over governments' increased interest in social media policing by enacting online content regulation legislation as observed in Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Lesotho. Moreover, several of these countries fall short on the privacy front with Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe lacking data protection and privacy laws. In countries where such laws exist, including Uganda and more recently Zambia, some provisions have been cited for undermining their intended purpose, and the two countries are yet to pass legislation to guide the implementation of the data protection laws.

Meeting objectives

The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) will convene a regional online webinar on July 23, 2021 to raise awareness of the pressing internet freedom challenges in the region; drive knowledge sharing on best practices on defending internet freedom; and promote collaborative responses by human rights defenders to these emerging challenges.

Participation: Key internet experts, CSO, policy makers among others in the east and southern region.

Panelists



Maxence Melo,
Executive Director, JamiiForums



Tabani Moyo,
Executive Director, MISA Zimbabwe



Richard Mulonga,
Executive Director, Bloggers of Zambia



Mamothokoane Tlali,
Deputy President, Internet Society Lesotho Chapter



TSANDZANA Dércio,
Researcher and ICT policy expert, Mozambique



Dorothy Mukasa,
Executive Director, Unwanted Witness Uganda



Moderator: Juliet Nanfuka,
CIPESA

Panel questions:

- What are the most pressing internet freedom challenges in your country?
- What are you and other actors doing to address these challenges?
- How can we best collaborate to better advance internet freedom in Africa? What are the priority issues to address and what are the best ways to tackle them?

Agenda

10:00am - 10:15am

● **Welcome remarks and Introductions**

Juliet Nanfuka, Research and Communications Officer, CIPESA

10:15am - 11:00am

● **Panel discussions**

- Maxence Melo, Executive Director, JamiiForums
- Tabani Moyo, Executive Director, MISA Zimbabwe
- Richard Mulonga, Executive Director, Bloggers of Zambia
- Mamothokoane Tlali, Deputy President, Internet Society Lesotho Chapter
- TSANDZANA Dércio, ICT policy expert, Mozambique
- Dorothy Mukasa, Unwanted Witness Uganda

11:00am - 11:30am

● **Q&A session**

11:30am - 11:45am

● **Closing remarks**



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