



Social Media Shutdown in South Sudan Will Aggravate Human Rights Violations

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The Digital Rights Alliance Africa (DRAA) - a network of non-government organisations that champions the digital civic space and counters threats to digital rights on the continent - is deeply concerned by the recent shutdown of social media platforms by the South Sudan government. The government claims the disruption is aimed to curb the dissemination of graphic content that portrays violence against South Sudanese nationals in neighbouring Sudan, and will last three months.

The measure is a response to escalating violence and protests across the country arising from the [killing of South Sudanese nationals](#) by the Sudanese armed forces in Sudan's El Gezira state. In response, nationals of South Sudan staged riots during which at least 16 Sudanese citizens were killed.

The shutdown will aggravate an already precarious human rights situation, undermine the ability of citizens to document the crimes being committed, and deny the public access to information that is vital to making decisions in life-and-death situations - such as how to access essential services like healthcare or routes to safety away from the conflict zones.

Moreover, fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, access to information, and peaceful assembly and association, will be undermined. Social media platforms and digital spaces are critical to fostering transparency, dialogue, and trust in times of crisis. Shutting down these spaces creates an information vacuum that breeds disinformation, which not only deepens societal divisions but also undermines efforts toward restoring peace and the rule of law.

According to article 24 of the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan,

- (1) Every citizen shall have the right to the freedom of expression, reception and dissemination of information, publication, and access to the press without prejudice to public order, safety or morals as prescribed by law.
- (2) All levels of government shall guarantee the freedom of the press and other media as shall be regulated by law in a democratic society.

The constitution further guarantees freedom of assembly and association in article 25 and access to information under article 32.

Having [acceded](#) to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, South Sudan has an obligation to respect and promote fundamental human rights and freedoms including expression and access to information, assembly and association.



Shutting down social media restricts vital communication, suppresses civic engagement, and hinders citizens' ability to participate in democratic processes. The shutdown is contrary to the established international human rights standards which require that such restrictions on citizens' rights must only be implemented where they meet the three part test of (i) being provided for by law; (ii) serving a legitimate aim and (iii) being necessary and proportionate in a free and democratic society. Imposing a shutdown on social media constitutes a disproportionate measure that instead restricts free access to information online - a critical mode of communication in periods of instability.

The decision to curtail access to social media platforms is a dent to South Sudan's commitment to regional and international laws and undermines the realisation of civil liberties in the online spaces for the people of South Sudan. Specifically, it violates the [Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa 2019](#) which, among others, recognises the importance of internet access. It also goes against the recent 2024 Resolution on Internet Shutdowns and Elections in Africa, which emphasises that states should not interfere with the right of individuals to seek, receive and impart information through any means of communication and digital technologies, and should avoid interrupting access to the internet and other digital technologies.

DRAA calls upon the South Sudan government to:

1. Immediately lift the social media ban and restore access to social media platforms to ensure free expression and access to critical information by the citizens.
2. Respect human and peoples' rights, including digital rights, in accordance with regional and international instruments, which protect the rights of the people of South Sudan to communicate, assemble and associate.
3. Address the root causes of the current unrest and engage in meaningful and transparent dialogue with community leaders, civil society organisations, and affected communities to address underlying grievances and promote reconciliation to build an accountable, peaceful and inclusive society.
4. Protect all affected communities and take urgent and necessary steps to safeguard vulnerable groups, including Sudanese traders and other minorities, ensuring their safety and dignity are preserved.
5. Refrain from actions of ordering internet service providers to shut down the internet, to disrupt internet connections to ensure constant free expression, open flow of information and the holding of the perpetrators of human rights violations accountable.

DRAA urges the African Union, regional bodies, and the international community to hold South Sudan accountable for these repressive measures. We also continue to stand in solidarity with the people of South Sudan and reaffirm our commitment to advocating for digital rights and freedoms across Africa.

Signed by

CIPESA in collaboration with the Digital Rights Alliance Africa (DRAA).



About Digital Rights Alliance Africa (DRAA)

The Digital Rights Alliance Africa is a network of traditional NGOs, media, lawyers and tech specialists from across Africa that seeks to champion digital civic space and counter threats to digital rights on the continent. The Alliance was created by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) and the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) in response to the rising digital authoritarianism in the region. It currently has members from 11 countries, who collectively monitor, engage in research, advocacy, share strategies for navigating digital threats and promote digital policy reforms in line with their shared vision outlined in the [outcome declaration endorsed in 2023](#).

About CIPESA

The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) is one of two centres established under the Catalysing Access to Information and Communications Technologies in Africa (CATIA) initiative, which was funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID). CIPESA focuses on decision-making that facilitates the use of ICT in support of good governance, human rights and livelihoods. CIPESA's establishment in 2004 was in response to the findings of the Louder Voices Report for DfID, which cited the lack of easy, affordable and timely access to information about ICT related issues and processes as a key barrier to effective and inclusive ICT policy making in Africa. As such, our work responds to shortage of information, resources and actors consistently working at the nexus of technology, human rights and society.
