

# IN AFRICA **REPRESSION** WITH DISCRETION



STATE OF PLAY OF  
**INTERNET OUTAGES**  
IN AFRICA SINCE 2014

**MAY 2023**



TOURNONS LA PAGE

Tournons La Page (TLP) is an international movement bringing together over 230 African civil society organizations supported by European organizations whose aim is to promote democratic alternation and good governance in Africa and elsewhere.

Created in 2014, Tournons La Page brings together coalitions in 14 African countries (Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Uganda, and Togo).

## ABBREVIATIONS GUIDE

<b>ACHPR</b>	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (CADHP in French)
<b>AMRTP</b>	Malian Telecom regulator - Autorité Malienne de Régulation des Télécommunications et des Postes
<b>ARCEPT</b>	Chadian Telecom regulator - Autorité de Régulation de Communication Électronique et des Postes du Tchad
<b>ARCT</b>	Burundi Telecommunications Regulation and Control Agency
<b>ARPT</b>	Guinean Telecom regulator - Autorité de Régulation des Postes et des Télécommunications de Guinée (Post and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority)
<b>ARPTC</b>	DR Congo Telecom regulator - Autorité de Régulation des Postes et des Télécommunications du Congo (DRC)
<b>CAMTEL</b>	Cameroon Telecommunications
<b>CENI</b>	Independent National Electoral Commission
<b>CIPESA</b>	Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technologies
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union
<b>LCC</b>	Lay Coordination Committee in DRC (CLC in French)
<b>MACRA</b>	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>ONU</b>	Organisation des Nations Unies
<b>OSC</b>	Organisation de la société civile
<b>RFI</b>	Radio France International
<b>TLP</b>	Tournons La Page
<b>UCC</b>	Uganda Communications Commission
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (DUDH in French)
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNJHRO</b>	United Nations Joint Office for Human Rights in the DRC



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**PUBLICATION DATE > MAY 2023 • EDITORIAL TEAM > TOURNONS LA PAGE  
GRAPHIC DESIGN > ROMAIN LABORDE**

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## STATE OF PLAY OF **INTERNET OUTAGES** IN AFRICA SINCE 2014

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

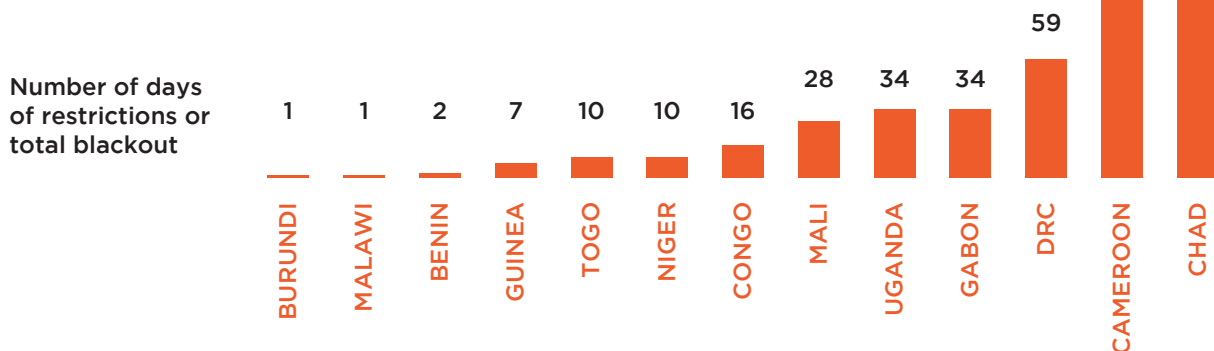
In an ultra-connected world, the Internet has become a central tool in the lives of millions of people, whether for work, for keeping in touch with loved ones or for collective organization, particularly during demonstrations or elections. Having understood this, repressive regimes partially or totally cut off the Internet in times of crisis. These outages violate international law, jeopardize their economies and, in most cases, are deemed ineffective.

Although the majority of Internet outages take place in Asia, the African continent is not left behind. For example, since the launch of Tournons La Page in 2014, of the 14 African countries where Tournons La Page operates, 13 have resorted to Internet blackouts. This generalization is all the more worrying in that very often, major repressions are organized during blackouts, hidden from the eyes of the international community.

## PODIUM OF INTERNET CUTTERS

TOP 10 COUNTRIES WHERE TLP IS PRESENT WITH THE MOST INTERNET OUTAGES

**TOTAL: 1,260 DAYS**





# INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the almost fundamental role of the Internet for many economic and social activities worldwide. By changing the way we live, work, study, defend our interests and communicate, this pandemic has imposed physical distance while bringing us closer together via digital communication applications. The Internet and the development of digital technologies are revolutionizing our societies, intertwining people's daily lives all over the world. For many, its daily use is a professional obligation as well as an economic and social necessity. The Internet has also made it possible for people to continue to assert their rights and campaign for change and greater democracy, while remaining informed even in confined spaces.

In spite of this, several African states continue to deprive their citizens of this tool whenever there is a risk of large-scale social unrest, under the general pretext of combating public disorder. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *"blackouts [are] generally aimed at suppressing demonstrations concerning a wide range of social, political or economic grievances, demonstrations which have often triggered other repressive measures"*.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, some states are also restricting mobile service to 2G or limiting bandwidth, which, without officially cutting off Internet access, makes it almost impossible to use. National or regional Internet blackouts, bandwidth limitations, content or site blocking aimed at repressing social movements and preventing access to and sharing of information have multiplied in recent years. In 2022, Le Monde reminded us that *"around one in six Internet blackouts worldwide is caused by an African state"*,<sup>2</sup> a practice mainly used during elections or demonstrations. On a continent where politics is at the center of conversations on Twitter,<sup>3</sup> these blackouts are all the more damaging to democratic life.

In 2019, a report by the Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) highlighted that of the 22 African countries that resorted to Internet blackouts between 2015 and 2018, 17 were considered authoritarian regimes according to the Democracy Index.<sup>4</sup>

At a time when 194 member countries of the United Nations General Assembly have pledged to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, the 9th of which aims to *"significantly increase access to information and communication technologies and ensure that all people in the least developed countries have affordable access to the Internet by 2020"*<sup>5</sup> and the 16<sup>ème</sup> to *"guarantee public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements"*,<sup>6</sup> the numerous Internet blackouts recorded since the early 2010s seem to go against the grain.

Often ineffective, the blocking of the Internet to combat content or activities considered by governments to be threats to public order generally results in collateral damage for Internet users and for national economy. At present, there is no evidence of the effectiveness of these Internet cuts in solving the problems they are supposed to address, particularly when it comes to restoring public order. Rather than solving problems, by attempting to cover them up and put an end to them, this process, which undermines freedom of expression and opinion and violates the right of access to information, often exacerbates them, leading to further tensions and human rights violations.

From 2014 to 2022, the African continent has seen at least 142 Internet blackouts in 35 countries, with the number of states practicing this repressive technique increasing alarmingly. For example, the NGO Access Now claims that in 2019, “seven of the fourteen countries that blocked access had not done so in the previous two years. The new countries to block access were Benin, Gabon, Eritrea, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania and Zimbabwe”.<sup>7</sup> This is part of a global trend, with more and more countries restricting Internet access: 19 countries in 2017, 35 countries in 2022.<sup>8</sup> Although Egypt was the first country to attract international attention by shutting down the Internet for almost a week during the Arab Spring of 2011, a shutdown that was accompanied by hundreds of arrests and murders, it is India that remains well ahead in the ranking of digitally repressive states, with 84 shutdowns in 2022.<sup>9</sup>

According to Access Now, the trend in Africa is for the Internet to be restricted to the national scale, rather than to smaller scales (regions, cities, specific groups of people). As a result, whether in Africa or more generally at global level, the number of restrictions is increasing, but so is the extent of the territories affected, and with it the number of people affected.

At a time when governments are committed to relying on the Internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to achieve the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals in areas such as education, health and economic development, removing Internet access for entire populations is extremely counter-productive.

This report, entitled “*In Africa, repression with discretion*”, aims to document cases of cuts or restrictions to Internet since 2014 in the 14 African countries where TLP operates, and highlights the link between Internet shutdowns and attacks on democracy. It does not aim to make a thorough assessment of all Internet cut-offs operated but tends to demonstrate the scale and recurrence of this practice from one country to another, which participates in the repression carried out by national authorities. To this end, this report lists, in a reverse chronological order, and on the basis of various sources, the numerous Internet blackouts carried out by governments, which constitute violations of international law.

██████████

# WHAT THE LAW SAYS

*“While they have far-reaching consequences for many human rights, Internet shutdowns most immediately affect freedom of expression and access to information, which are among the foundations of free and democratic societies, and are indispensable conditions for the full development of the individual. This is the cornerstone of all the other rights guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other human rights instruments. Any restriction on freedom of expression is a serious violation of human rights.”*

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## UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE, 2022 <sup>10</sup>

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Strongly motivated by political and national security concerns, state-sponsored Internet shutdowns have become the “new normal” in many countries. This is despite the fact that the United Nations considers the obstruction of Internet access, for whatever reason, to be a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Thus, in its resolution of June 27, 2016, the UN condemned “measures aimed at deliberately preventing or disrupting access to or dissemination of information online, in violation of international human rights law, and calls upon all States to refrain from and end such practices”. <sup>11</sup>

On November 4, 2016, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), “concerned by the emerging practice of States parties to interrupt or limit access to telecommunication ser-

vices such as the Internet, social media and message services, particularly during election periods”, adopted Resolution 362. <sup>12</sup> This calls on “States parties to respect and take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect the right of citizens to freedom of information and expression through access to Internet services”.

In May 2022, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report on Internet blackouts and their consequences, particularly in terms of human rights. The report states that “while general cuts in Internet access have serious consequences and are never justifiable, other forms of network and communications disruption are also likely to have undifferentiated negative effects, making them disproportionate”. <sup>13</sup>

In addition to national laws and constitutions, which in many cases guarantee freedom of expression and the right to information, a number of regional and international texts are binding on states that have ratified them, placing them above national laws.

Regarding the existence of digital rights, Abdelkerim YACOUB, Africa Director of Internet Sans Frontières, states that “there are several legal texts that recognize digital rights, but these texts don’t deal directly with digital issues. Digital law has been adapted to these long-existing texts”.

## AFRICA :

**Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights ratified by 54 African countries:** *"Everyone has the right to information [...] Everyone has the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the framework of the laws and regulations".* <sup>14</sup>

**Principle 38, paragraph 1 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa:** *"States shall not engage in large-scale disruption of access to the Internet and other digital technologies, targeting segments of the population or an entire population".* <sup>15</sup>

**Article 6 of the Directive on combating cybercrime in ECOWAS:** *it is an offence "for any person to obstruct, distort, attempt to obstruct or distort the operation of a computer system".* <sup>16</sup>

- Article 33 of the Constitution of the International Telecommunication Union, 193-member countries: *"Member States recognize the right of the public to correspond by means of the international public correspondence service".* <sup>19</sup>

However, Abdelkerim YACOUB points out that *"the 2014 Universal Declaration on Internet Governance recognizes the principle of freedom of expression, privacy, online security and universal access to the Internet. (...) The adoption of this declaration has made it possible not only to combat unilateral Internet blackouts by governments, but also in a global, inclusive spirit, i.e. to involve and hold accountable the companies that operate in those states where blackouts take place. Companies are now also responsible for the consequences of outages, so citizens can take action against these companies. This is a major step forward. With the Guidelines for the Protection of Digital Rights drawn up by the United Nations, such as the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, we now have a lever for those defending digital rights: even if we can't sue these companies in the states where the cuts are made, we can sue them in their countries of origin, their headquarters. Today, the right to access the Internet has been recognized as a human right, on a par with the right to access water, health and education. (...) So its violation, its shutting-downs, its restriction is a violation of human rights"*

## INTERNATIONALLY :

- Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".* <sup>17</sup>
- Article 19, paragraph 2 of the ICCPR, ratified by 168 countries: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, this right includes freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, (...) either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of one's choice".* <sup>18</sup>

# THE **IMPACTS** OF INTERNET OUTAGES

*“When a state cuts off access to Internet, people and economies suffer. The costs in terms of employment, education, health and political participation almost always outweigh the hoped-for benefits”*

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**MICHELLE BACHELET, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2022** <sup>20</sup>

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As well as having serious economic and technical consequences, and a negative impact on human rights and democracy, Internet outages damage confidence in the Internet and the country's reputation as a whole. Decision-makers need to put these impacts and security imperatives into perspective.

## **ECONOMIC IMPACT**

Internet outages affect the economy in many ways. They reduce productivity and generate financial losses, particularly in the framework of urgent transactions. According to a study published by Brookings, Internet outages that took place in 19 countries between July 2015 and June 2016 cost at least \$2.4 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) worldwide. <sup>21</sup> A study published by Top10VPN adds that since 2019, outages have resulted in losses of \$42 billion. <sup>22</sup>

A CIPESA study states that sub-Saharan Africa lost \$237 million to Internet outages between 2015 and 2017. <sup>23</sup>

In October 2016, Deloitte published an impact evaluation illustrating that “the impacts of a temporary Internet outage are proportional to the country's level of development and the maturity of its Internet ecosystem. For a country with a high level of Internet connectivity, the daily impact of a temporary shutdown of the Internet and all its services is estimated at an average of \$23.6 million per 10 million inhabitants. For lower levels of Internet access, the estimated average impact on GDP would respectively be 6.6 million dollars and 0.6 million dollars per 10 million inhabitants for economies with average or low Internet connectivity”. <sup>24</sup> Examples include :

- The December 2018 Internet blackout in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) cost the country 3 million dollars a day
- Zimbabwe's January 2019 internet blackout cost the country 5.7 million dollars per day
- The June 2019 blackout that lasted over a month in Sudan cost the country more than one billion dollars, or nearly one percent of the country's GDP. <sup>25</sup>

The NetBlocks [Cost of Shutdown Tool](#) (COST) estimates the economic impact of an internet disruption, mobile data outage or app restriction using indicators from the World Bank, ITU, Eurostat and U.S. Census.



Affected country or region

Niger

▼

Whole country

▼

The regions affected by a subnational shutdown  
(not available)

Services restricted, throttled or unavailable  
in partial shutdown

Total shutdown

▼

Or none in case of a total shutdown

Days

1

▲

▼

Hours

0

▲

▼

The duration of the disruption

\$1,056,784

TOTAL COST IMPACT

F CFA 635,881,489

CFA FRANC BCEAO

① Estimated economic impact of a one-day blackout in Niger

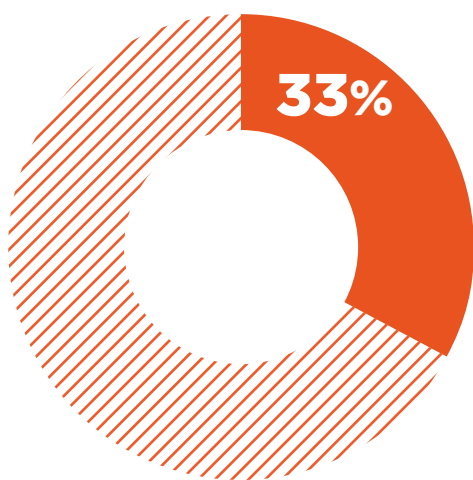


To calculate the economic impact of Internet shutdown in a country or region, the Netblocks organization has developed the Cost of Shutdown Tool (COST), based on indicators from the World Bank, the International Telecommunication Union and the U.S. Census Bureau. <sup>26</sup> ■



## IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

In many cases, governments resort to Internet blackouts during sensitive periods, when the power of their leaders may be called into question. In Africa, this often means elections. And the examples are legion, affecting transparency, freedom of expression and civic engagement at critical times. When the population expresses its displeasure, some governments decide to block SMS, social networks or the entire Internet.



**1/3 of all national elections between 2015 and 2018 were accompanied by an Internet blackout**



According to a study by Open Tech Fund, in Africa, “a third of all national elections between 2015 and 2018 were accompanied by an Internet outage. The level of voting irregularities and electoral violence (...) were significantly higher in elections during which an Internet outage occurred”. <sup>27</sup>

The UN adds that between 2016 and 2021, “cuts in Internet access have affected at least 52 elections”. <sup>28</sup> The organization adds that “Internet blackouts create significant obstacles to democratic electoral processes and the free flow of information, which can erode confidence in electoral processes and

increase the likelihood of hostilities and violence. They are particularly detrimental to opposition groups with fewer resources, who may be eminently dependent on online channels for campaigning and mobilization. They also severely hamper the work of journalists and the media in general, who are a key element of fair elections.”

In 2020, Malawi annulled the results of its presidential election following a Constitutional Court ruling pointing the finger at widespread irregularities, during which the networks were partially cut off. <sup>29</sup>

Another recurring case of Internet shutdowns occurs when the authorities organize police or military operations to maintain order.

Not only do these cuts hamper voting and policing activities, making it difficult to disseminate information, but they also make it possible to conceal a number of human rights violations, thereby hindering their documentation. The United Nations points out that “in some cases, cuts are made with the deliberate intention of concealing human rights violations. The dissemination of information on serious violations is said to have been hampered, for example, by cuts in Myanmar and Sudan, as well as during the repression of demonstrations in the Islamic Republic of Iran”. <sup>30</sup>

We asked Abdelkerim YACOUB, Africa Director at Internet Without Borders, about the dangers of Internet blackouts for democracy:

“Internet blackouts can be a danger to democracy for several reasons (...). We have found that cutting the Internet can seriously disrupt democracies, in the sense that **today the Internet has become a tool that has changed the paradigm in those states where the circulation of information was controlled by those regimes.** Thanks to the Internet, today information circulates more freely in some circumstances, citizens can express themselves and governments can no longer control as they did before, because before telephones, radio and TV were controlled by the state. Today, thanks to social networks,

apps, websites and blogs, the circulation and production of information are no longer the prerogative of state services. Internet blackouts can be used to prevent the dissemination of critical or dissident information. Today, if certain governments find themselves in a difficult and critical situation during a social crisis, demonstrations, elections, economic tension or political crisis, they often tend - at least in Chad's case - to cut off the Internet because it enables citizens to communicate, organize peacefully, disseminate information, testimonies, opinions, criticism and denunciations. We've found ourselves in a situation where the Internet has enabled passive citizens, consumers of information, to become active citizens, producers of information and witnesses; citizens who demand accountability from those in power. *There's been such a change in the relationship between the governors and the governed that the only way they've found to counteract it is to cut off the Internet.* When you cut off the Internet, you cut off the links that have been forged between these different citizens, scattered across territories, often in countries where there is no infrastructure, where there are no means of communication, and if there are, it's rare and expensive. *So the Internet has given a real boost to countries where freedom and democracy are advancing very, very slowly. The Internet is very important for democracy, and to cut it off is to clip the wings of democracy.* In 2012, Senegalese civil society and electoral observers used the Internet to ensure the transparency of elections and to report the results of the elections in real time from the various polling stations. This made it possible to hold free, transparent and fair elections, and mainly helped to build confidence, because if people see that their vote has been taken into account and that each polling station has been counted transparently, they will have more confidence in their institutions, in their democracy, and it also makes it possible to ease political tensions and above all avoid violence."

## **Internet cuts are having a serious impact on the work of activists and civil society organizations (CSOs).**

"Internet blackouts on social networks can have serious consequences for civil society. Because the levers that civil society uses to achieve its objectives and actions, to advocate, raise awareness and defend its various objectives, are the Internet. *Thanks to the Internet, many CSOs are now operational.* If there's no Internet, these CSOs can't function, and when you look at the different means of communication used by these organizations today to organize events, Zoom meetings, use WhatsApp to communicate internationally, to have contacts abroad, sometimes the organizations don't have an office, it's thanks to the Internet that they function. They may also be able to escape the control and surveillance of certain states or governments, which are quite authoritarian and try to limit the capacity for action of civil society players and activists, who sometimes do very dangerous work. The impact is enormous. We've seen in many countries, where civil society and CSOs are hyperactive during election periods or periods of electoral and economic crisis, where people were communicating a lot, expressing themselves, informing themselves or others in real time, as soon as the Internet is cut off everything stops (...) *In countries where civil society has started to work with the Internet, I don't see how they can continue to carry out their activities efficiently if they no longer have the Internet*" ■



# STATE CONVICTIONS FOR HAVING CUT THE INTERNET

**SEVERAL STATES HAVE ALREADY BEEN CONDEMNED BY NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COURTS, DEMONSTRATING THAT THE RESTRICTION OR TOTAL SUSPENSION OF THE INTERNET IS NOT LEGALLY JUSTIFIED, BUT RATHER POLITICALLY MOTIVATED.**

- On January 21, 2019, Zimbabwe's High Court of Justice ruled that Internet following protests against rising fuel prices violated the constitutional rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the media. It called on mobile telephony operators to immediately and unconditionally restore all their services. <sup>31</sup>
- On June 25, 2020, Togo was condemned by the ECOWAS Court of Justice which ruled that the blackouts that took place from September 5 to 10, then from September 19 to 21, 2017, on the occasion of the popular demonstrations were "illegal" and that restricting access to the Internet ran counter to freedom of expression. <sup>32</sup>

It is rare, however, to see condemnations of Internet blackouts and for these condemnations to be respected. This is what Abdelkerim YACOUB says: "You really need to be in an environment (...) where state, regional and sub-regional institutions and organizations function and are respected, listened to and have influence over member states. In Central Africa, it's totally dysfunctional; these states don't respect the decisions at all, or follow the sentences very little, and there have been very few sentences. In West Africa, they're much more effective, because economically they're fairly integrated, and politically too, so if there's a conviction, pressure can be brought to bear even where jurisdictions cannot enforce it directly, but there are effects on the international level, on international organizations, on regional and sub-regional

public opinion (...). In general, these States are a little sensitive to these opinions, but for it to work, the States condemned must really be part of regional, sub-regional or continental organizations, which are respected, listened to and have levers of pressure on these States, otherwise it's more a symbolic condemnation".

Numerous other complaints have been lodged by local and international civil societies. This is the case in Niger, where the Internet was cut off following the results of the 2021 presidential election, <sup>33</sup> but also in Chad, following the cuts in 2016, <sup>34</sup> or in Cameroon, where Internet was cut off for several months in the English-speaking areas in 2017. <sup>35</sup>

According to Abdelkerim YACOUB, there are alternatives to Internet outages, but for outages at source "there's not much you can do if you don't have satellite antennas, (...) it's practically impossible to get Internet access in a country where the Internet has been physically cut, where the cables have been cut.(...) *The only way to remedy this is to be in border towns, where people sometimes manage to pick up the network of a neighboring country, such as N'Djaména in Chad, which manages to pick up the Kouséri network in Cameroon.* (...) In the case of censorship, when you don't physically cut off the Internet, but restrict it, for example by blocking access to certain sites or applications, (...) you can use a VPN (virtual private network), which encrypts connection data and routes it to servers in other countries, thereby bypassing censorship and accessing blocked sites and services, i.e. changing IP addresses. (...) Decentralized networks such as Tor can also be used to surf the Internet unnoticed, invisibly and anonymously. It enables connections to be routed through intermediary servers, and can also be used to bypass censorship and access blocked sites and services, but *in Senegal, for example, the government has decided to ban the use of Tor, meaning that if you use Tor you risk prosecution, as it's a presumption of violation of the Internet navigation code in certain states.* (...)

Today, to use Tor is to be considered as a dangerous person at risk for these states. You can use Tor as you should in democratic countries. Other ways of circumventing censorship are encrypted messaging services. Instead of using traditional messengers where messages can be intercepted, we use Signal, Telegram, which can enable us to communicate securely and protect privacy, and even activists who are under surveillance, who are afraid of being caught because they are communicating important information, even journalists use this to protect their sources. (...) Because some governments have bought softwares for intercepting and filtering everything that happens on the networks, like Pegasus (...), there are some who manage to intercept this encrypted messaging information anyway, but it's the only solution that exists today. You can also use UBlock to block tracking, for example, to protect the privacy and security of civil society, activists and pro-democracy campaigners (...) on the Internet. *However, we have to be careful to see if all these tools are authorized in these countries, we have to look at the legislation of these States concerning these bypass tools so that activists and Internet users are not legally threatened in these States."*

"It's extremely difficult to find a company that refuses to shut down the Internet at the request of governments. First of all, you have to consider two types of companies: national and international. *As far as international companies are concerned, I think it's impossible for them to oppose the decisions or requests of the governments of the countries in which they operate, because they are private companies with specifications to sign, obligations and licences.* In any case, personally, I haven't never seen a company refuse to cover the Internet, in the name of respect for citizens' rights, and pack up, close down and leave the country. That's not possible, because they're businesses, and they profit from state obligations and specifications. *National companies, on the other hand, may refuse the cuts, sometimes out of militancy or a political stance. We've already seen this. In Egypt, during the Arab Spring, all international companies cut off*

*the Internet, except for one committed local company, which refused to cut off the Internet.* I think in Tunisia too, at the beginning, but we had to cut the Internet afterwards. That's really rare. In authoritarian countries, it's hard to find companies that refuse to cut off the Internet if the government authorities ask them to."

To combat these blackouts, "the first thing is to raise awareness, so that national public opinion can understand the importance of the Internet for freedom of expression and access to information, and if they don't have the Internet, to make them understand that this has a very negative impact. Awareness-raising, advocacy and mobilization campaigns also make it possible to combat cut-offs on three levels: at the level of Internet users, providers and the state. Once we've raised awareness, we also need to prepare technical assistance: we need to help organizations, communities and activists get around these blackouts. (...) We also need to strengthen the capacity of organizations and movements fighting against such censorship, by giving them the communication tools they need to denounce and report digital rights violations, and to defend the rights of online freedoms.(...) After that, *we need to put pressure on governments, it's important to find levers to put pressure on those who flout the digital rights of their citizens;* political or institutional pressure: advocacy, petitions, we can even go to international institutions to put pressure on these governments".

According to YACOUB, Internet access should be a condition of eligibility for financial aid.

██████████

# SOME TOOLS

## FOR OSC TO FIGHT INTERNET RESTRICTIONS & BLACKOUTS **ACCORDING TO YACoub:**

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### 01

Monitor and document all shutdowns and restrictions, signaling them by mass communication to mobilize the international community.

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### 02

Advocacy and awareness-raising, with private players rather than governments, as they don't want to suffer from a bad image.

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### 03

Using the levers of tech-assistance: they enable communities and CSOs to equip themselves by setting up wireless community networks, for example, which offer the possibility of sharing data, information and documents without going through national networks, thus bypassing censorship and no longer being dependent on national operators.

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### 04

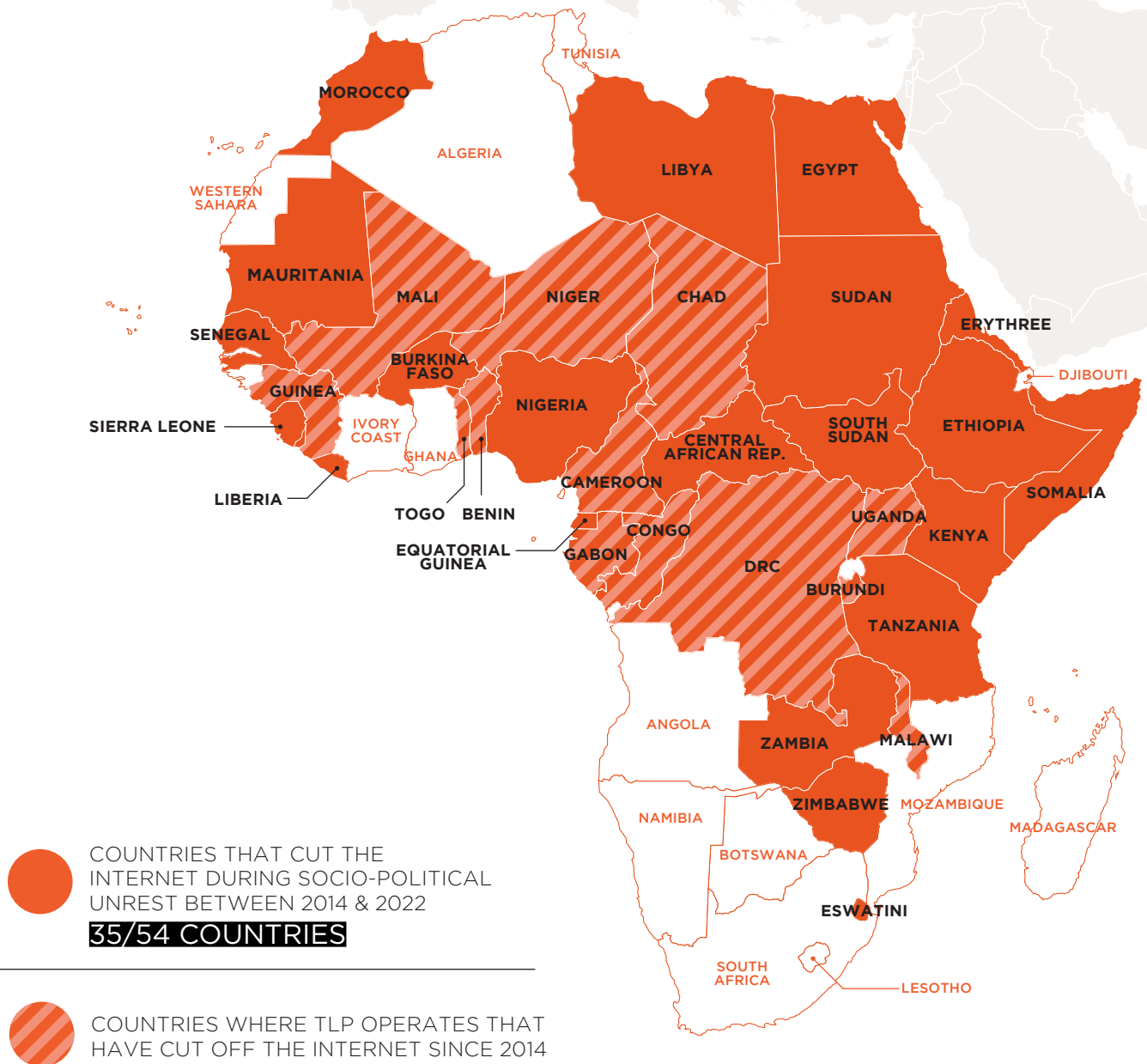
Initiate legal proceedings against cuts and restrictions: this depends on the institutions' ability to deliver justice and enforce sanctions.

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### 05

Developing solidarity: CSOs in common objectives on a regional or sub-regional scale can network and create a "*collective intelligence*", thus increasing their effectiveness through a mass effect that puts more pressure on governments.

# INTERNET **OUTAGES** ON THE TLP NETWORK



Source: <https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/publications/Dictateurs-et-restrictions-Rapport.pdf>

## OCTOBER 20, 2022 IN CHAD

After violent demonstrations against the extension of the military transition, Internet was cut off in the towns where there were the most protests (*Cf. Annex 01: Letter from the UN Special Rapporteurs on November 3, 2022*). On the evening of October 20, a curfew was introduced in four towns in Chad: N'Djamena, Moundou, Doba and Koumra <sup>36</sup> following demonstrations that were violently repressed, resulting in the deaths of at least 128 people, 518 injuries and 942 arrests, including 265 convictions, according to the National Human Rights Commission. <sup>37</sup>

The government, through its Minister of Communication and spokesman, Aziz Mahamat SALEH, told RFI that the government was not behind the disruption: *"With the curfew, everyone is at home and on the lookout for information. Everyone is connected at the same time. There were already connection problems, which have now unfortunately been exacerbated. Even the operators have been asked by the government to improve things. But as far as I know, there are no Internet blackouts in Chad."* **38**

The Internet was finally restored on October 27. **39**

*"In the macabre situation of October 20, 2022, the government had to further restrict connections by systematically cutting off the Internet. To get a connection, Internet users are obliged to use security parameters. Now, with the situation in Sudan since April 15 [2023], the government is taking advantage of this situation, also in view of the hate messages (...). Since the situation in Sudan, the government has been cutting off the Internet connections every Tuesday, from 6 pm to 9 pm. So this situation is surprising to us. Tournons La Page Chad is constantly campaigning and lobbying the transitional government on the issue of shrinking civic space, especially when it comes to Internet blackouts. So to say that the problem is with the fiber optics is a false problem, the government is taking advantage of the situation in Sudan."*

**ENOCK DJERANE,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-CHAD

# THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN 2021

## OCTOBER 9, 2021 IN CHAD

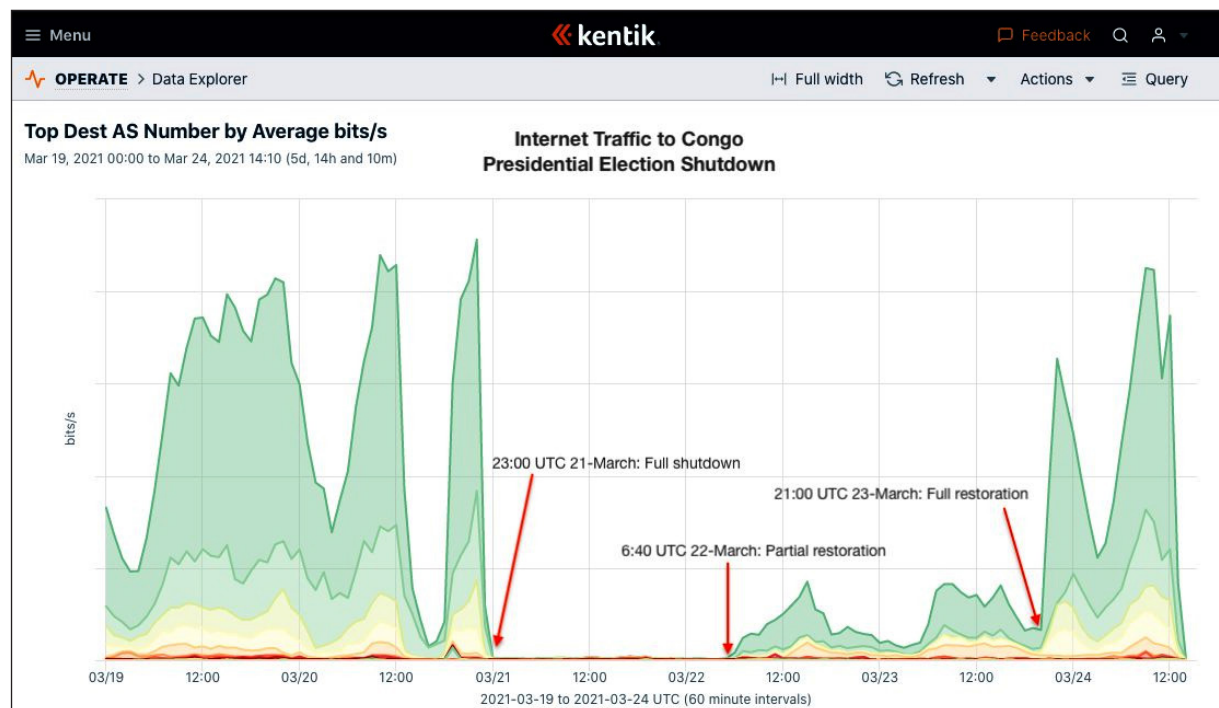
On the morning of a new demonstration called by the Wakit Tama collective, made up of civil society organizations and opposition parties, the Internet network and text messages were slowed down for several hours in certain districts of the capital, N'Djaména. <sup>40</sup> <sup>41</sup> The demonstrators were protesting against the Military Transition Council in place since April 20, 2021, following the death of President Idriss DÉBY.

The demonstration, which was banned because of the risk of “disturbing public order” <sup>42</sup>, was harshly repressed, with at least ten people reportedly injured in clashes with security forces. ■

## MARCH 21, 2021 IN CONGO

A few hours before the presidential election, Internet and social networking access was completely cut off by local authorities shortly after midnight local time (23:00 UTC) nationwide. Telephone and SMS communications, on the other hand, were not cut off. <sup>43</sup> Service was only partially restored following the announcement of the results, which saw Denis Sassou NGUESSO re-elected to his fourth consecutive term of office on March 22. Full restoration took place on March 23 at 10 pm local time, i.e. a 3-day blackout. <sup>44</sup> The government denied being behind the blackout. Spokesman Thierry MOUNGALLA said: “The government is used to backing up its acts. If it had decided on a cut-off, it would have done so in the open air, and has no comment to make on any possible network disruption”. <sup>45</sup>

Ahead of the presidential election on March 16, 51 organizations published a joint letter calling on the President-in-Office not to cut off the Internet. <sup>46</sup> ■



02 Evolution of the Internet blackout in Congo on March 21, 2021



## **FEBRUARY 28, 2021** **IN CHAD**

Amid reports of a deadly armed raid on the home of opposition candidate Yaya DILLO, the Chadian authorities cut off the Internet. <sup>47</sup> The Internet network was disrupted from 9am onwards, and “was reduced by 60%” around 9:30am. <sup>48</sup> The two main mobile networks affected are Airtel and Moov, as well as fixed-line telephony services. According to TchadInfos, telephone networks were partially restored on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Internet connections will be restored on March 3. <sup>49</sup> Security reasons are mentioned by the authorities to justify this outage. <sup>50</sup> ■

*“From the seizure of power by the Military Council of Transition in Chad in April 2021 until after the people took power, from May 27 until May 31, the government systematically cut off Internet connections and after retraction and also a bitter struggle by civil society, this cut-off was restored but the disruptions continued.”*

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**ENOCK DJERANE,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-CHAD

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## **FEBRUARY 24, 2021** **IN NIGER**

After the preliminary results of the presidential election were announced on February 23, with candidate Mohamed BAZOUM winning the second round, demonstrations broke out in Niamey and several other towns. As a result, the authorities cut off mobile Internet for 10 days in certain regions of Niger with the country’s four operators, <sup>51</sup> Niger Telecom, Zamani Telecom, Moov Africa Niger and Airtel Niger, until 11.30 pm local time on March 5 throughout the country. Meanwhile, post-election unrest has left two people dead and 468 arrested. After the network was restored, one of the four telephone companies informed its customers by message that the incident was “beyond its control” <sup>52</sup> ■

*“On February 24, 2021, the day after the provisional results of the presidential election were announced, I was volunteering with Tournons La Page Niger. The blackout occurred while we were working to complete the observatory report on the second round of the presidential election. It lasted for around ten days and had a major impact on the Nigerian population. Not only were we cut off from the rest of the world, but even certain economic transactions could not be carried out. To be able to continue our work of awakening citizens through social networks, we had to be in the office where we had a wifi connection. Once we left the office, we were left deaf and dumb, cut off from our means of work. The only alternative to being cut off is to stay in the office, and unfortunately you can’t stay there outside working hours. Naturally, I was angry, because all the companies working via the Internet were having difficulties operating, not to mention the impact of this restriction on the country’s economy”.*

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**ISMAËL HALDI,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-NIGER


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## **JANUARY 12, 2021** **IN UGANDA**

Two days before the presidential and parliamentary elections on January 14, and as President Yoweri MUSEVENI seeks his sixth term in office, the country’s main providers imposed restrictions on access to social networks and messaging services, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Telegram, Skype, Viber, Wechat and Tumblr throughout the country. <sup>53</sup> On January 13, an Internet blackout began at 7 pm. Connectivity then fell to 33% of the ordinary level, then to 18% around 10 pm. On election day, connectivity was only 12% at 6 pm <sup>54</sup> ■

The restrictions and cuts were ordered by Irene SEWANKAMBO, Executive Director of the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC). <sup>55</sup> The commission first called the TV companies, ordering them “*violently and aggressively*” to carry out the cuts, before sending them a letter to “*immediately suspend all access and use*”. <sup>56</sup> On January 12, UCC spokesman Ibrahim BBOSA told AFP that he was “*not aware of any directive to cut off Internet or social networking platforms*”, adding that “*Connectivity has been slow on the platforms, which may be explained in part by heavy traffic due to the upcoming elections*” <sup>57</sup>.

According to AFP, the UCC’s blocking request to telecoms services was accompanied by a list of 100 VPN networks to be blocked as well. <sup>58</sup> Operators MTN, Africell and Airtel confirmed the suspension in a statement on January 13.


**Africell Uganda**  
 @africellUG

Africell Uganda wishes to inform its valued customers base that further to recent directives from the Uganda Communications Commission we have been ordered to suspend access to our Internet Gateways and associated access points until further notice.

[Traduire le Tweet](#)

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**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
 Wednesday 13 January 2021

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Africell Uganda, a leading communications and technology-enabled service provider, wishes to inform its valued customer base that further to recent directives from the Uganda Communications Commission we have been ordered to suspend access to our Internet Gateways and associated access points with immediate effect.

Africell Uganda has been left with no alternative other than to comply with the aforementioned order. Accordingly, customers are currently unable to access the internet via our network. Our voice and Afrimoney services remain unimpacted and continue to operate as usual.

As soon as the Uganda Communications Commission lifts this suspension, customers will once again be able to access the internet and take advantage of Africell’s full portfolio of services.

We thank you for your loyalty towards Africell Uganda and your patience during this time.

**For more information, please contact:**  
 Edgar Karamagi, Public Relation Officer  
 edgar.karamagi@africell.ug



03 Africell Uganda press release on the January 2021 blackout


**PUBLIC NOTICE:**  
**ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PLATFORMS**

**Wednesday 13 January 2021**

Airtel Uganda wishes to inform its esteemed customers that following a directive from Uganda Communications Commission, access and use, direct or otherwise of all social media platforms and online messaging applications has been suspended until further notice.

As a result, Airtel Uganda customers are currently not able to access the aforementioned services via its network.

All other services offered by Airtel Uganda continue running seamlessly including Airtel Money.

Thank you for choosing Airtel Uganda.

**Management.**

**For more information, please contact:**  
 Sumin Namaganda  
 Public Relations Manager  
 Sumin.Namaganda@ug.airtel.com

04 Airtel press release on the January 2021 blackout





05 MTN press release on the January 2021 blackout

access to social networks and message services such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, Viber, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Discord and Skype will not be restored until February 10 - with the exception of Facebook, described as “deadly” by Peter OGWANG, Minister of Information and Communication Technologies. When the suspension was lifted, the Minister tweeted: “We apologize for the inconvenience caused, but it was for the security of our country”. <sup>62</sup>



06 Tweet from the Minister of Information and Communication Technologies on the January 2021 blackout

By January 9, Facebook had deleted hundreds of accounts associated with President Yoweri MUSEVENI “who have engaged in money-laundering operations to enclose public debate prior to the elections. They used fake and duplicate accounts to manage pages, comment on other people’s content, impersonate users, re-share messages in groups to make them appear more popular than they were”. <sup>59</sup>

In a televised address ahead of the election, the president justified the Facebook shut-down, citing arrogance and specifying that “If it [Facebook] is to operate in Uganda, it should be used fairly”. <sup>60</sup>

The connection was partially restored on January 18, and at around 9.45am connectivity showed “an increase (...) to 37%”. <sup>61</sup> In the evening, connectivity had reached 90% of its normal level. On the other hand,

On January 20, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sam KUTESA, was quoted as justifying these cuts at a diplomatic meeting, stating that they would have prevented the dissemination of incitement to violence during the election period. <sup>63</sup> On January 22, the New Vision newspaper reported that access to social networking sites would be restored “on a case-by-case basis”, when the government deemed that they no longer represented a risk of incitement to violence in Uganda. <sup>64</sup> Despite several negotiations, Facebook reportedly agreed to reinstate the deleted accounts in January 2021. <sup>65</sup> On December 23, 2022, President Yoweri MUSEVENI declared that Facebook would be reinstated “if they [Facebook] stop playing”. <sup>66</sup> According to Access Now, at the end of 2022, Facebook had 719 days of blocking <sup>67</sup> ■

## JANUARY 9, 2021 **IN UGANDA**

The Google Play platform, which lets users download VPNs to bypass censorship, was blocked from January 9 ahead of the presidential election on January 14. WhatsApp reportedly showed signs of blocking on January 9, but more consistently from January 12. From January 13, the country experienced a widespread Internet blackout that lasted 4 days, from the day before the election (January 13, 2021) to the morning of January 18, 2021 ■ **68**

## THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN **2020**

### OCTOBER 23, 2020 **IN GUINEA**

As the country prepares to announce the official results of the presidential election in which Alpha CONDE, after amending the Constitution in March, is seeking a third term in office, the Internet was cut off at 7:30 UTC, along with roaming and international calls for users of the Orange network, the country's main operator. The blackout reduced the operator's traffic to "9% of its usual capacity", according to Netblocks. **69** At the same time, access to social networks was restricted on two operators: MTN and Cellcom.

On October 24, Moustapha Mamy DIABY, Deputy Director General of the Autorité de Régulation des Postes et des Télécommunications (ARPT), mentioned in a deleted tweet that bandwidth had been restricted in a bid to "combat online hatred and incitement to ethnic confrontation". **70**



⑥7 Tweet from ARPT deputy director general on the October 2020 Internet blackout

That same day, roaming was restored, according to Orange Guinea, in the early evening. On October 25, in a press release, Orange stated that it had "received no notification of the reasons for this shutdown". ⑥8

According to a senior Sonatel official contacted by Jeune Afrique, the cut-off went even further: the reduction in the network operated by Orange "did not satisfy the authorities, prompting them to cut the valves directly at Guilab", Guinea's leading telecoms infrastructure operator in charge of managing the ACE international cable, the only gateway between Guinea and international communications. The blackout will last until 1 pm on October 27 ■

Conakry le 25 Octobre 2020

## Communiqué de presse

Orange informe son aimable clientèle qu'elle assiste à une coupure depuis 72H, sans aucun préavis, de ses liens de sorties à l'international au niveau de Guinée.

Jusqu'à la date de ce communiqué, Orange n'a reçu aucune notification sur les raisons de cette coupure. Cette situation entraîne depuis le 23 Octobre des perturbations dans la fourniture de plusieurs de nos services à nos clients allant jusqu'à l'indisponibilité totale de la fourniture des services internationaux (dont la voix, le roaming, l'internet) sur notre réseau.

Les services voix international et roaming ont été rétablis hier samedi 24 octobre en début de soirée. Orange tient à marquer son grand étonnement dans la mesure où cette coupure concerne uniquement les liens d'Orange Guinée.

Orange n'a par ailleurs reçu aucune notification d'un quelconque non-respect d'une obligation de son cahier des charges ou d'un manquement à une loi de la République.

Orange rappelle que cette situation brise le principe de l'égalité de traitement des acteurs du marché et espère que les mesures appropriées seront prises par les autorités de tutelle dans les meilleurs délais pour le rétablissement de cette situation.

Orange Guinée sait compter sur la compréhension de tous ses clients.



## JULY 22, 2020 IN CHAD

On July 14, a violent altercation took place in N'Djaména market between an army colonel and a civilian. The soldier shot a mechanic and one of his colleagues in a car parts shop following a disagreement, and the altercation was filmed and broadcast on social networks. <sup>71</sup> The angry crowd then attacked the colonel, who spent several days in a coma. The mechanic succumbed to his injuries. Rumors of "horrific abuses" against suspects in the hands of the law fueled the dissension. <sup>72</sup> The authorities took advantage of the situation to completely restrict Internet access in all provincial towns, two days after blocking the WhatsApp application in the capital. The WhatsApp messaging application was blocked in N'Djaména from July 22, 2020, on the two main operators Airtel and Tigo. <sup>73</sup>

On August 3, the Minister of Communication, Chérif Mahamat ZENE, assured us that this restriction had been ordered to avoid "the dissemination of messages inciting hatred and division", specifying that this temporary measure would be «lifted at any moment». <sup>74</sup> Internet and social networks were restored in the provinces on the evening of August 18, after users received a message from their operator. <sup>75</sup> However, messaging services will remain blocked until October 2, 2020 <sup>76</sup> ■

08 Orange Guinea press release concerning the October 2020 Internet blackout



Je suis un consultant indépendant; je gagne mes revenus à travers l'Internet. Cette coupure est lourdement préjudiciable tant au niveau de mes activités de cabinet que mes consultations en ligne, qui peuvent être évaluées à 3500 Euros. Aussi j'ai raté un emploi dans la sous région (Yaoundé) du simple fait que je n'ai pas pu me connecter pour passer l'entrevue à la date indiquée et que la candidature est déjà obsolète. c'est vraiment dommage.



20/8/2020  
Moula Franklin du Tchad

#KeepItOn

09 Testimonial collected by Access Now as part of its #KeepItOn campaign.

## **JULY 10, 2020 IN MALI**

Against a backdrop of mass demonstrations organized by the M5, a movement bringing together political parties, civil society organizations and religious leaders calling for political reforms and protesting against the regime of President Ibrahim Boubacar KEITA since the disputed legislative elections of March 2020, the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook and the messaging applications WhatsApp and Messenger are blocked on the Orange network in Mali. Netblocks notes on July 13 that operator Malitel, too, has cut mobile access to Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, with Viber and Instagram. The organization points out that “Internet censorship measures are implemented at ISP level and applied differently by each company”.<sup>77</sup> An account gathered by RFI indicates that, depending on the region, the cut-off affects the entire Internet, as in Gao, while in other regions only access to social networks, as in Bamako.<sup>78</sup> The restrictions were lifted on the afternoon of July 15 ■

## **MAY 20, 2020 IN BURUNDI**

On the morning of the presidential, legislative and local elections, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram and WhatsApp remained unavailable to users of the main mobile operators Econet, Onatel and Lumitel.<sup>79</sup>

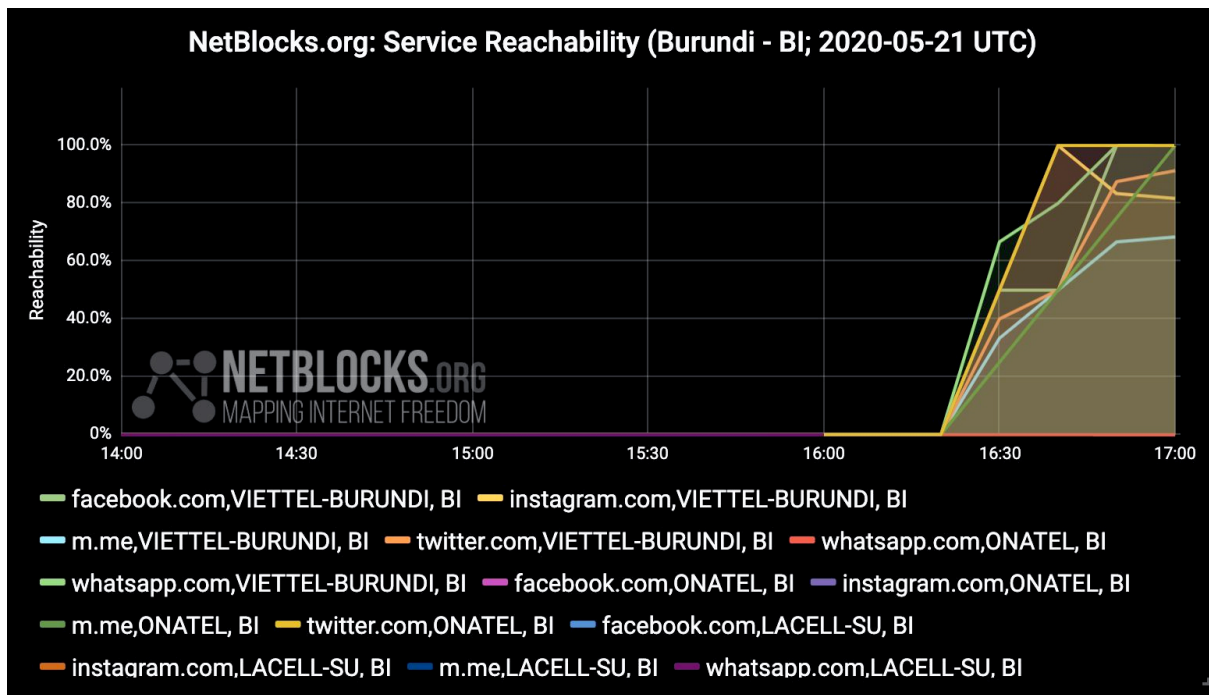
YouTube and Google are also intermittently restricted. There were reportedly 2 waves of restrictions: one at 5 am, and a second at around 7 am, with more social networks blocked.<sup>80</sup> The restrictions were lifted late tomorrow afternoon, after 36 hours of blackout. On the morning of the same day, Willy NYAMITWE, Burundi’s ambassador to Addis-Abeba, declared on Twitter that there was no blackout ■

*“I’m a journalist and in 2020, during the elections in Burundi, there was an Internet blackout and I had difficulty contacting my sources in the field. Only those with digital security training used VPNs to contact me locally. (...) There were sources I couldn’t find at the time. The Internet was cut off during the elections because there was a plan to rig the elections, as we saw that the results of the 2020 elections were not satisfactory. The Internet was cut off because of electoral fraud. Lately in Burundi, telecommunications companies have been giving promotions to customers who only work on social networks, to prevent users from visiting the websites of exiled newspapers that work online, such as Itara Burundi, Inzamba and RPA (...). These kinds of promotions and packages are only accessible via social networks. Many young people are unable to use the Internet sites that could give them jobs. So we’ve politicized everything, believing that Burundians who search the Internet can see what’s being said on sites about Burundi. Really, it’s catastrophic, but up to now we’ve seen that the Internet doesn’t have sufficient speed in Burundi (...). Even if we don’t cut, we don’t give a speed that’s sufficient, we don’t give packages that allow you to surf the sites.”*

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### **A MEMBER OF TLP-BURUNDI**

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10

**Amb. Willy Nyamitwe**   
@willynyamitwe

Internet n'est pas coupé au #Burundi contrairement aux rumeurs en circulation 👉

**Damien Roulette** @daroulette · 20 mai 2020  
#Burundi - Internet coupé en ce jour de scrutin mais pas pour ce conseiller du président [twitter.com/willynyamitwe/...](https://twitter.com/willynyamitwe/)

8:16 AM · 20 mai 2020 depuis

11



NetBlocks.org: Infrastructure Disruptions: Guinea - GN, 2020-03-20				
location	incident_impact	incident_auto_classification	low_pct	curr_pct ▲
ETI SA, AS37141	🔄 RESTORING	🌐 internet outage	0%	92%
ORANGE, AS37461	🔄 RESTORING	🌐 internet outage	54%	92%
vdctelecom, AS37430	🔄 RESTORING	🌐 internet outage	0%	93%
Skyvision-Guinee-AS, AS328244	✅ RESTORED	🌐 internet outage	0%	95%
Areeba-Guinea-AS, AS37612	✅ RESTORED	🌐 internet outage	0%	96%
MouNa, AS37665	✅ RESTORED	🌐 internet outage	0%	97%
GUILAB-AS, AS328107	✅ RESTORED	🌐 internet outage	0%	100%
Cellcom, AS37427	✅ RESTORED	🌐 internet outage	13%	100%



12

## MARCH 20, 2020 IN GUINEA

Two days before parliamentary elections and a referendum on constitutional reform that would allow President Alpha CONDÉ to run for a third term, the Internet was disrupted nationwide at around 20:00 UTC, with connectivity down to 12% of its usual level. <sup>81</sup> <sup>82</sup> Operator Guilab, 52.55% of which is owned by the Guinean state, had announced the outage due to work on a submarine cable. <sup>83</sup> <sup>12</sup>

The following day, March 21, the eve of the elections, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram were unavailable and WhatsApp partially blocked <sup>84</sup> on Orange and MTN operators, with restrictions continuing throughout polling day on March 22. The disruptions lasted until 8am UTC on March 23. ■

*“As a leader of the FNDC, I was opposed to the double ballot which favored an illegal and illegitimate third term for President Alpha CONDÉ. Despite all the peaceful marches we organized to dissuade Alpha CONDÉ, he nevertheless decided to offer himself a third term cut short by the Groupement des Forces Spéciales led by Lieutenant-Colonel Mamadi DOUMBOUYA. This cut prevented me from doing my job, which was to monitor cases of human rights violations, hate speech and settling of scores. I was very shocked by the cut-off, as I only use one mobile phone operator, Orange Guinea. I was prevented from exercising an inalienable right. I found myself inactive and stressed. To make up for the cut-off, I bought a new SIM card, but unfortunately the Internet wasn’t working properly. I even used VPNs to pursue my activities, but the results were mediocre.*

*The blackout affected almost all Orange Guinea users. On social networks, Guineans called on the authorities to promote more competition among mobile operators to avoid this kind of blunder."*

*"I was very angry at the authorities and especially the operators for being instrumented by politics. I was groaning with pain. I was very angry. It's a shame to be deprived of a fundamental right, which is the Internet in our young democracy."*

*"To tell the truth, everyone who uses Orange Guinea was unhappy with the repeated Internet shutdowns. I think the authorities need to change the way they manage the Internet, which is an inalienable right to this day."*

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**ALSENY FARINTA CAMARA,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-GUINEA

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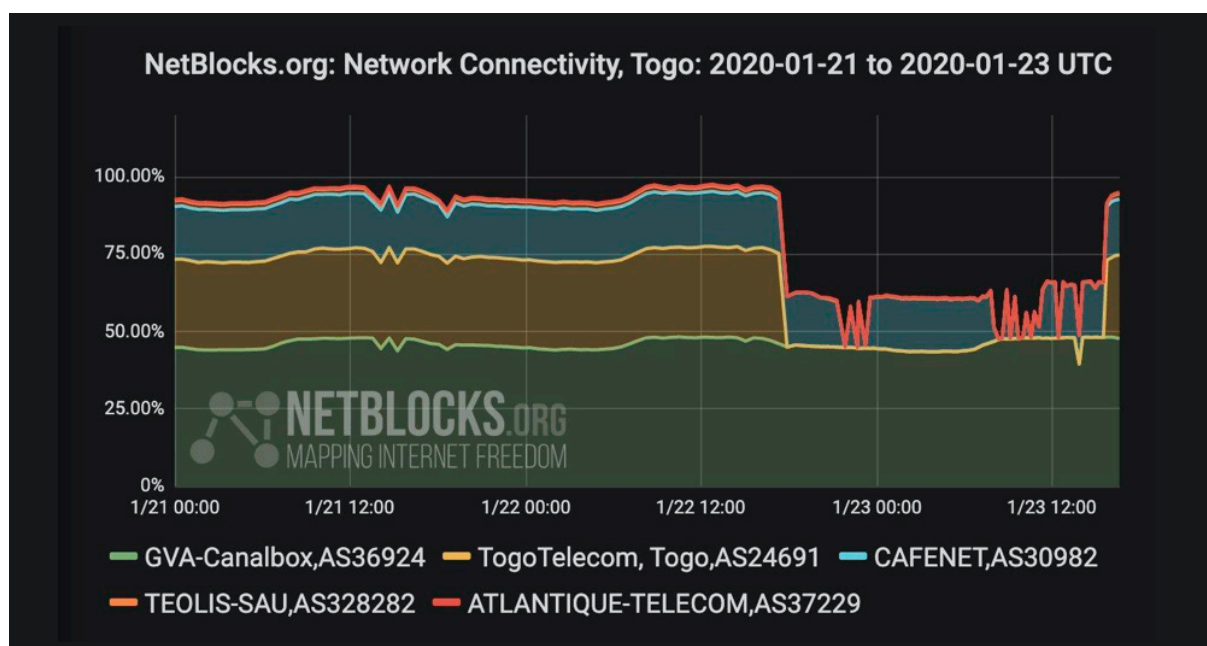
## FEBRUARY 22, 2020 **IN TOGO**

On the evening of the presidential election, as polling stations were closing, the authorities cut Messenger, Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp until the following Friday on two networks: Togo Telecom and Atlantique Telecom, but they were available on the Canalbox network. <sup>85</sup> The Internet connection will be restored the following day. The day before the vote, the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), had declared that an outage was possible during the electoral process <sup>86</sup> ■

## JANUARY 22, 2020 **IN TOGO**

One month before the presidential election in which President Faure GNASSINGBE is seeking a fourth term in office, the Internet was cut off nationwide by operator Togocom. The reason given by Togocom is that *"the West African Cable System (WACS) is experiencing a partial or total absence of Internet service. This is due to a double section on the submarine cable segments as well as on the terrestrial backup segment"*. <sup>87</sup> An argument refuted by journalists and technicians who denounce a *"test cut"* in the run-up to the elections <sup>88</sup>

13 ■



13

# THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN 2019

## MAY 21, 2019 IN MALAWI

With the country set to vote in the presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections, connectivity dropped to 80% of its usual level at 4:30 pm, as the ballot counting began. The restriction will last until 10 pm. <sup>89</sup> Malawi Telecommunications Limited, fiber optic network SimbaNET and ICT infrastructure operator Malswitch were reportedly impacted, while private providers were not. Another outage occurred from 2.30 am to 3 am on the Skyband provider. <sup>90</sup>

On May 19, a meeting of the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) was held to discuss plans to cut off social networks and telephone services on election day to cut off access to information, implementing a law that forces telephone companies to cut off telecommunication facilities if requested to do so in order to “*protect national order and security*” and “*facilitate the technical restriction of conditional access to online communication*”. <sup>91</sup> <sup>92</sup>

During the same period, television broadcasts and radio signals, including those of BBC World and VOA Africa, were also interrupted. <sup>93</sup> MACRA had issued a letter on May 20, warning users of social networks against the spread of fake news and stating that it was working with stakeholders to find solutions to prevent their spread. (*Cf. Appendix 02: MACRA letter of May 20, 2019*).

On May 8, 2020, the Malawian Supreme Court unanimously annulled President Peter MUTHARIKA’s close electoral victory on the grounds of irregularities. They are “*widespread, systematic and serious*”. <sup>94</sup> ■

## 1<sup>ST</sup> OF MAY 2019 IN BENIN

Shortly after the legislative elections, riots broke out and Internet access was blocked again at around 9 pm, as former president Thomas Boni YAYI called for a boycott of the elections. At the start of the blackout, the Beninese government issued a tweet urging citizens to use only official government channels to stay informed and to “*avoid exposure to rumors and false news that may exist through social media and other unofficial channels*”. According to Net-Blocks, not all ISPs are affected to the same extent, the most affected being the major providers. Service was restored around 7:30 am the following day. <sup>95</sup> <sup>14</sup> ■



14



*“At the time of the blackouts, I was in Porto-Novo in the capital city. I was in charge of monitoring and relaying human rights violations during and after the elections. I had to transmit in real time the information obtained. WhatsApp was the quickest way for me to send informations to the director and other team members. I could no longer do it in time. I had to look for workarounds, including the use of VPNs. But to no avail. I was powerless in the face of this situation, as everyone feared that the director or certain members of the team were being bugged. Unfortunately, I was limited in what I could do. The speed and reliability of information was an integral part of the job. Unfortunately, the information came later, even though it was useful. To make up for this, we had to make direct calls. Even this approach was difficult, as the network was floating. My work was limited. What’s more, information was not circulating, even on a national level. This made the atmosphere a little tense, especially in Porto-Novo, since one of the city’s most important parties had not taken part in the elections. I felt a sense of powerlessness and abuse of my rights. As a human rights activist and Amnesty International Benin activist [at the time], I heard others complaining about the violation of their rights, and I helped them as best I could with my group (an Amnesty entity) that I led. Experiencing it myself was really complicated, and for once, I participated in the feelings of the victims. I wasn’t angry, but rather weakened, unable to find a solution. I was driven by a feeling of powerlessness. These were anxious moments, because the warning signs of trouble were palpable. Not knowing what was going on left and right made people wonder.”*

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**ROCK AHOTON,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-BENIN

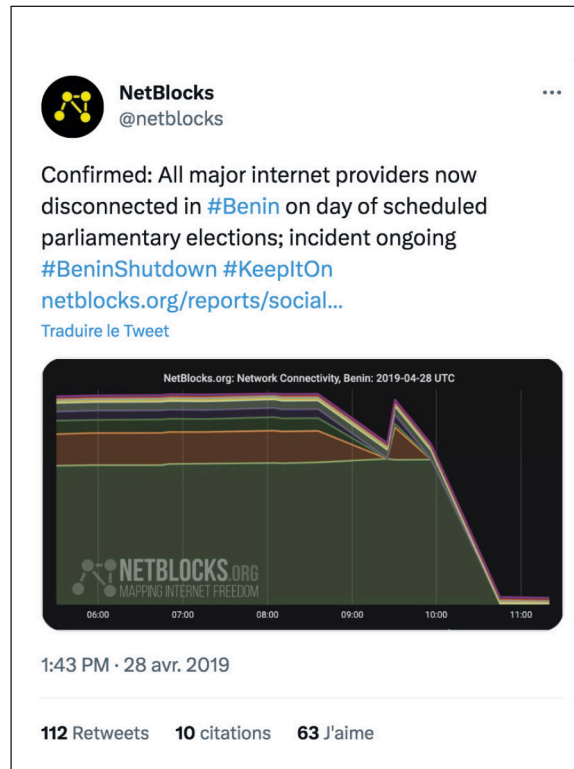
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## APRIL 27, 2019 IN BENIN

On the night before the parliamentary elections, <sup>96</sup> social networks and messaging services such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger, LinkedIn, WeChat, Skype, Tinder and Snapchat were blocked for several hours. In addition, “the image, video and recording services of several applications” have been restricted”. <sup>97</sup> VPN networks have also been restricted, including OpenVPN, Tunnelbear, TigerVPN and PureVPN.

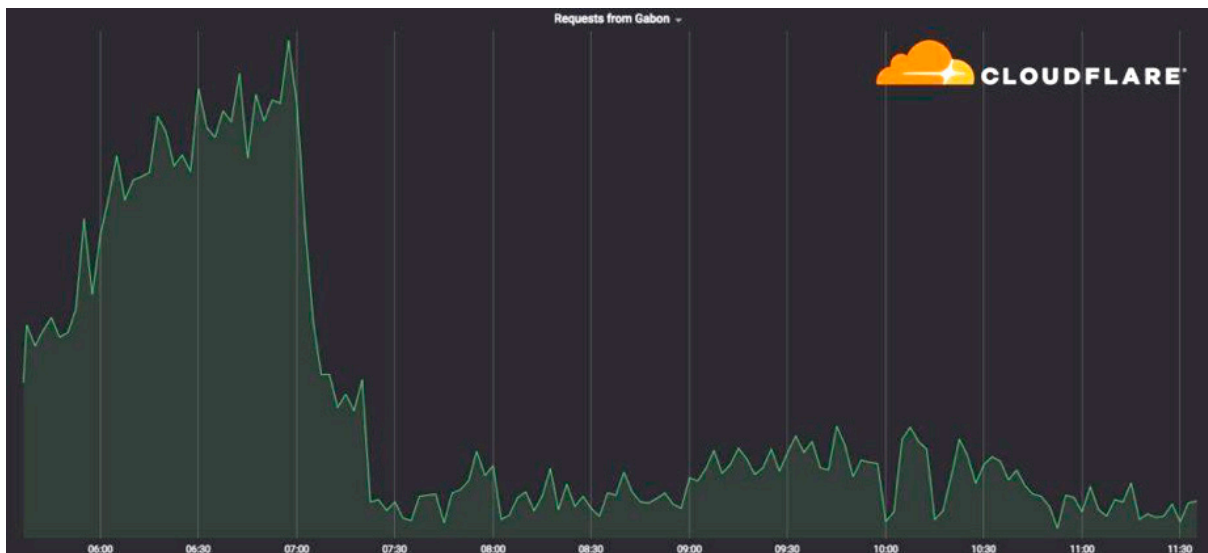
On the day of the elections, April 28, the Internet provider Spacetel was cut off from 8:30 am until the main providers were completely cut off from 11 am, Spacetel being the hardest hit. At 5.40 pm, Netblocks reported that 99.5% of the country had lost Internet access, with the last connections shutdowns.

The Internet was restored at 10.50 pm on the same day, after around 15 hours of outage. Full access was restored on the morning of April 29. <sup>98</sup> <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> ■



15

NetBlocks.org: Global Reachability, Benin - BJ, past 1 hour, 2019-04-28						
cca2	country	platform	state	failure_rate	reachability ▲	rtt
BJ	Benin	purevpn	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	2 s
BJ	Benin	m	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	476 ms
BJ	Benin	messenger	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	372 ms
BJ	Benin	telegram	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	3 s
BJ	Benin	linkedin	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	3 s
BJ	Benin	viber	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	388 ms
BJ	Benin	fbcdn	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	475 ms
BJ	Benin	facebook	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	3 s
BJ	Benin	tigervpn	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	726 ms
BJ	Benin	cdninstagram	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	532 ms
BJ	Benin	twitter	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	2 s
BJ	Benin	instagram	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	2 s
BJ	Benin	t	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	2 s
BJ	Benin	openvpn	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	776 ms
BJ	Benin	tinder	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	187 ms
BJ	Benin	snapchat	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	2 s
BJ	Benin	kik	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	2 s
BJ	Benin	hola	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	570 ms
BJ	Benin	skype	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	3 s
BJ	Benin	wechat	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	1 s
BJ	Benin	twimg	DOWN	<div></div>	0%	432 ms
BJ	Benin	whatsapp	DOWN	<div></div>	21%	2 s



⑪ Coupure Internet au Gabon le 7 janvier 2019

## JANUARY 7, 2019 **IN GABON**

Following an attempted coup d'état at around 4:30 am, while President Ali BONGO was out of the country for medical treatment, the Internet was shutdown at 7 am UTC in Libreville and Port-Gentil. The connection was partially restored at around 10 am, before being disrupted again in large parts of the country. The outage affected the main operators: Gabon Télécom, its mobile subsidiary Libertis and Airtel. <sup>99</sup> The connection was finally re-established late in the following morning, after a 28 hours blackout. <sup>⑪</sup> <sup>100</sup> ■

Global, <sup>101</sup> statement confirmed by telephone operator Vodacom. Lubumbashi and parts of Kinshasa have been completely cut off since 13:00 UTC. On the other hand, in Goma and other areas, the connection has been disrupted since 7 am. The Netblocks observatory reports that “*blocking is not centralized, but rather applied at the discretion of commercial operators*”. <sup>102</sup>

The President's diplomatic adviser Barnabé Kikaya Bin KARUBI declared as a justification that the outages would avoid “*a popular uprising*” when the results were counted. <sup>103</sup>

Radio RFI stated the day after the elections that six of its nine transmitters had been cut off, making it impossible to listen in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Kisangani, Goma, Bukavu, Mbandaka, Matadi, Mbuji and Mayi. <sup>104</sup>

The blackout prompted several European countries and the United States to issue a joint communiqué calling on the government to restore Internet and media access. <sup>105</sup> Internet and SMS access will finally be restored on January 19, 2019. <sup>106</sup>

## THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN **2018**

### DECEMBER 31, 2018 **IN DRC**

In the aftermath of the general elections, and as polling station results were being broadcast on Twitter, mobile and fixed-line connections were cut off in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Goma, “*on government instruction*”, reported the access provider

*"In the DRC, during the 2018 elections, in December 2018, there were untimely and regular cuts in Internet and access to all social networks for a very long period of about a month, and this was because there were strong political tensions following these elections, which were marred by a great deal of fraud. Some of the country's observers - including those from Tournons La Page DRC as part of the "Je vote, je reste" program, which was supported by the Secours Catholique - already had reports of the real election results and had begun to pass them on to organizations such as the Catholic Church. The ruling power was afraid that this would further incite people to revolt, and the only solution they could come up with was to interrupt the Internet connection, to cut off all social networks, to allow their electoral fraud machines to publish their false results.*

*Their electoral fraud machines to publish their false results. It wasn't easy, especially for our election observers in the field, who had difficulty transmitting to us via WhatsApp or other channels their various photos of the reports containing the correct results, which sufficiently disrupted our work of observation and citizen monitoring of the transparency and credibility of the elections, so it wasn't easy, and we paid a heavy price. The people, the civil society organizations, the observers who were on the ground, the public and the media all paid a heavy price. As a consequence of the outage, we weren't able to play our role properly although there were some workarounds, we had to look to install VPNs but it wasn't always easy in all areas."*

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**JEAN-CHRYSTOSTOME KIJANA,**  
TLP-DRC COORDINATOR

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**18** Tweet from the US ambassador to the DRC



## OCTOBER 21, 2018

### IN CAMEROON

In the aftermath of the presidential election and when Facebook users organized a march to say goodbye to Biya», who is in his 36<sup>th</sup> year as president, Facebook and WhatsApp are severely disrupted. <sup>107</sup>

## JULY 29, 2018 IN MALI



19

On the day of the presidential election, access to several social networks such as Twitter and WhatsApp was blocked by the country's main operator, Orange Mali. The latter replied on July 31 to a citizen on Twitter that the blocking of these networks was beyond its control. <sup>108</sup> In a press release, the European Union *"calls on the authorities not to restrict freedom of expression during this election period, and to guarantee unhindered access to Internet and social networks"*. <sup>109</sup> The European Union observation mission also reports that bandwidth was slowed during the period between the two rounds, with very limited access to social networks. <sup>110</sup> A few days earlier, Arouna Modibo TOURE, Minister of Communication and Digital Economy, had stated that there were *"no plans to interrupt social networks during the election"*. <sup>111</sup>

On August 10, in the run-up to the second round of the presidential election on August 12, Internet disruptions took place nationwide. The NetBlocks site notes that the network's *"IP accessibility metrics"*

URL	Time	Results
<a href="https://twitter.com">https://twitter.com</a>	01:19 local	Accessible
<a href="https://twitter.com">https://twitter.com</a>	17:38 local	SSL error
<a href="https://guardianproject.info">https://guardianproject.info</a>	01:22 local	Accessible
<a href="https://guardianproject.info">https://guardianproject.info</a>	19:14 local	HTTP failure
<a href="http://www.anonymizer.ru">http://www.anonymizer.ru</a>	01:16 local	Accessible
<a href="http://www.anonymizer.ru">http://www.anonymizer.ru</a>	19:14 local	HTTP failure

<sup>20</sup> Tests carried out on July 29, 2018 by Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI)

fluctuate throughout the day, dropping sharply around 7 pm before rising again. <sup>112</sup> The network is thus under-capacitated, without being completely cut off. According to a survey of IP requests, the network experienced variations at least from August 10 to 16. <sup>113</sup>

On August 11 access to several social networks such as WhatsApp, Skype, Wechat, Snapchat, Telegram, Twitter and websites like Wikipedia or the BBC website was disrupted and suffered variations throughout the day. After the second round of the election, throughput was reportedly too low to allow Malians to bypass censorship using a VPN. <sup>114</sup>

Between August 15 and 16, the network experienced disruptions between 23:00 UTC and 5:00 am on August 16, prior to the announcement of the results of the second round of the election. ■

## **JUNE 4, 2018 IN MALI**

Following demonstrations on June 2 calling for transparent voting in the July 29 presidential election, which left at least 25 people injured, <sup>115</sup> access to social networks was blocked in the morning, particularly on the Malitel operator. <sup>116</sup> In response, on the same day the United Nations Secretary-General called for calm, and the European Union called on Mali to “respect freedom of expression and show restraint” <sup>117</sup> ■

## **MARCH 28, 2018 IN CHAD**

In a letter (*Cf. Appendix 03: Letter from the UN Special Rapporteurs on July 27, 2018*), three UN Special Rapporteurs accuse the Chadian government of having ordered “the blocking of social networking platforms and messaging applications”. Tigo Chad and Airtel, Chad’s two main operators, have thus blocked Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, Viber and BBC for 472 days. <sup>118</sup>

Alp TOKER, Executive Director of NetBlocks, <sup>119</sup> explains that “the data collected by the NetBlocks Observatory, comprising over 26,000 individual measurements, provides validated technical evidence of the selective slowdown, or throttling, of Internet services by major operators in Chad. Among the platforms affected are the main messaging and social media networks.” President Idriss DÉBY then justified the restriction of electronic communications on “security grounds” <sup>120</sup> while civil society accused him of staying in power to rule the Central African country until 2033 through an opportunistic fiddling of the Constitution. ■

*“This technical evidence of Chad’s Internet blackout, and its simultaneity with the country’s tense political situation, suggests that the government is once again restricting citizens’ digital rights, in particular online freedom of expression, for political reasons. We should not only question the government’s responsibility, but also the role played by Internet service providers in violating the digital rights of millions of Chadian and Central African citizens. We call on Chadian and Central African Internet users and international digital rights organizations to mobilize in support of Internet Without Borders in this initiative”. <sup>121</sup>*

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**A. YACOUB KOUNDOUGOUMI,**  
HEAD OF THE CENTRAL AFRICA  
DIVISION OF INTERNET WITHOUT  
BORDERS.

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21 Poster for the #Maalla\_Gatétou campaign

In response, civil society organized protests in Paris and N'Djamena using the hashtag #Maalla\_Gatétou (*“Why did you cut off”* in Chadian Arabic) <sup>122</sup> and two lawyers brought legal action to end the digital blackout. <sup>123</sup> The first hearing was held on September 11, 2018, at which Tigo and Airtel, the two cell phone companies being sued, acknowledged the restriction of social networks and defended themselves by stating that it was an injunction from the Republic’s highest authorities. During its hearing, ARCEPT reported that the order to cut off social networks emanated from the Minister of the Interior and Public Security, Ahmat Mahamat BACHIR. On October 4, 2018, the complaint was dismissed by the High Court on procedural grounds. The Court of Appeal will confirm the verdict on March 28, 2019. <sup>124</sup>

We will have to wait until July 13, 2019 before Chad’s president announces the restoration of Internet and social network connections. With 16 months of cut-off of main Internet services, Chad has just set a world record, and beaten its own record from 2016. A similar censorship operation lasted 235 days, costing the Chadian economy more than 18 million euros. ■



22 Tweet from President Idriss DÉBY ITNO

## FEBRUARY 25, 2018 IN DRC

As the CLC organizes new marches against Joseph KABILA’s continued rule, Internet access and SMS exchange have been cut off nationwide from 9 am to 7 pm. On February 22, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications issued a press release announcing that the Internet would be cut off at 10 pm for technical reasons, for a period of 3 days. <sup>125</sup> <sup>126</sup> On February 24, the Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and New Technologies, Emery Okundji NDJOVU, denied the possibility of an Internet blackout the same day from 10 pm following a *“rumor”* to that effect, calling it a *“false alarm”*. In a tweet, however, he said: *“It is entirely up to the State to assess the threat on public security with the possibility of interrupting*

the Internet and prohibiting in whole or in part, and for the time it determines, the use of communication facilities".<sup>127</sup> Despite the denial, the Internet will indeed be cut off on February 25, and will remain so until February 28.<sup>128</sup> ■

### **JANUARY 25, 2018 IN CHAD**

While peaceful demonstrations were being organized to protest against bad governance, anti-social measures, rising fuel prices, taxes and the cost of living, Internet (wifi and mobile data) went offline shortly after midnight.<sup>129</sup> The connection will be re-established on January 26, i.e. an interruption of around 24 hours.<sup>130</sup> ■

### **JANUARY 21, 2018 IN DRC**

On the day of new demonstrations organized by CLC, Internet access and text messaging were cut off shortly before 1 am on the instructions of the authorities. Access was restored on the evening of January 23.<sup>131</sup> ■

## **THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN 2017**

### **DECEMBER 30, 2017 IN DRC**

As President Joseph KABILA maintains his grip on power more than a year after the end of his mandate by constantly postponing the dates of the presidential elections, the Comité Laïc de Coordination (CLC), a coalition of civil society organizations, together with religious leaders and opposition political parties, organizes large-scale mobilizations in Kinshasa. The Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Emery Okundji NDJOVU, orders Internet service providers to suspend short message service (SMS) and Internet throughout the country from 6 pm on December 30 "for reasons of state security"<sup>132</sup> (Cf. *Appendix 04: Letter from the Minister to the Managing Director of Africel Congo*). The Internet was restored three days later ■

### **OCTOBER 4, 2017 IN TOGO**

Following protests in August and September 2017, civil society and political parties are planning new days of mobilization against the dynastic regime of Faure Gnassingbé. Mobile Internet access is cut off for the day.<sup>133</sup> ■

### **SEPTEMBER 28, 2017**

#### **IN CAMEROON**

While demonstrations are being organized on October 1<sup>st</sup>, the anniversary of the unification of the separatist NOSO (North-West and South-West) regions, where a declaration of independence from the state of Ambazonia was planned,<sup>134</sup> the authorities of the two English-speaking regions have reportedly ordered Orange and MTN to shutdown Internet access for two days (Cf. *Annex 05: Letter from the UN Special Rapporteurs on November 10, 2017*) in the anglophone NOSO regions and access to social networks, such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook in the French-speaking part.

On September 27, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications issued a press release denying rumors of an Internet blackout in the English-speaking part of the country (Cf. *Appendix 06: Cameroon Ministry denial*).

The outage will last until March 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, or 154 days. However, the connection works in slow motion and despite access to social networks, downloading or viewing photos and videos remains impossible.<sup>135</sup> On January 17, 2018, for an official visit, a partial restoration of the Internet took place in the southwest region temporarily.

As of April 25, 2018, the Internet connection was still experiencing disruptions, despite the lifting of the cut-off, prompting the UN Special Rapporteurs to send a letter to the Cameroonian state (the third in a year) denouncing these practices (Cf. *Appendix 07: Letter from the UN Special Rapporteurs on April 25, 2018*).



## SEPTEMBER 19, 2017 **IN TOGO**

On the eve of new demonstrations calling for a return to the 1992 Constitution, which sets two-term limits, the Internet was again disrupted on the evening of September 19, when restrictions on the social networks Facebook and WhatsApp were noted, before becoming inaccessible the following day. <sup>136</sup> The blackout was lifted on September 21. <sup>137</sup> In 2020, [the Court] found that a three-day cut-off of Internet access in Togo in September 2017 had violated the right to freedom of expression, and ordered the Government to compensate the applicant. <sup>138</sup> ■

## SEPTEMBER 5, 2017 **IN TOGO**

Following large-scale demonstrations on August 19 calling for a return to the 1992 Constitution and the departure of the dynastic regime in place since 1967, where the Internet was slightly disrupted, further rallies are scheduled for September 6 and 8. At around 8 pm on September 5, subscribers to the country's two mobile operators, Moov and Togocom, had their access to Facebook and WhatsApp blocked. The wireline network, on the other hand, worked. The next day, mobile Internet was completely cut off. <sup>139</sup> The cut-off was confirmed by Victoires FM radio, where Minister Gilbert BAWARA intervened, invoking security reasons and to avoid images circulating on the networks, specifying that "the State has no control or operational interference in the management of telecoms operators". <sup>140</sup> Citizens also reported that SMS messages and calls outside the country were blocked. <sup>141</sup> The blackout lasted until late evening on September 10 (*Cf Annex 08: Letter from the United Nations Special Reporters on September 28, 2017*). ■

*"Internet blackouts happen especially during election periods or large public demonstrations. First of all, it prevents us as human rights defenders from communicating with each other and sharing information. It's also very difficult for us, as human rights defenders, to go to the aid of the victims. So the victims, the people who are threatened, even arrests we can't control at the moment. (...) It's a strategy for the dictatorial power in Lomé to cut off the Internet during election periods, so as to be able to carry out fraud to the full, to be able to enjoy the electoral hold-up. So it prevents us from getting information, (...) from alerting quickly in case of attack or threat. Apart from that, (...) you're not safe when they cut off the Internet, you can't follow (...) what's going on in town, even at polling stations when it comes to elections. You'll even find that the Internet is cut off selectively: they target certain areas, for example in Lomé, the capital, where Bè and Kodjoviakopé are opposition strongholds, at least according to the authorities. At times, they knowingly cut off the Internet to prevent you from relaying information about police blunders (...). In any case, the collateral damage of these cuts is not exhaustive (...), it limits financial transactions (...) the whole economy is slowed down (...), we are in total insecurity, we are at the mercy of the authorities who can come and do anything (...) without you alerting national and international opinion. Authorities take advantage of the situation to (...) send you militias who come to beat people up in their homes, kidnap people, except that you can't communicate, alert people, you can't even share information (...). This is the moment when the regime chooses to carry out a hold-up at the polling stations: the rigged results. So it limits civic space."*

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**A MEMBER OF TLP-TOGO**

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## AUGUST 7, 2017 **IN DRC**

Following demonstrations and the call for two “ville morte” \* days on August 8 and 9 to demand the holding of elections in accordance with the Saint-Sylvestre Agreement, Oscar MANIKUNDA, Chairman of the ARP-TC, ordered the country’s various mobile providers, notably Orange, in a letter dated August 7 to restrict “to the strict minimum the capacity of image transmissions” on 18 social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp (Cf. *Appendix 09: ARTPC letter August 7, 2017*). The justification given is “to prevent abusive exchanges of images via social networks between subscribers of your network, I ask you to take upon receipt of the present technical preventive measures likely to reduce to the strict minimum the transmission capacity of images”. Although the letter does not specify a date for a return to normal, which ARPTC hopes will be “as soon as possible”, the restriction will last until August 11 ■

\* ville morte: A temporary state characterized by the absence of activities in the city due to a strike.

## JUNE 13, 2017 **IN MALI**

With a demonstration scheduled for June 17 against President Ibrahim Boubacar KEITA’s proposed constitutional reform, the Malian government blocked access to the social networks Facebook and Twitter on June 13 and 14, 2017. <sup>142</sup> The Malian government then absolved itself of any responsibility, arguing that it was “a global problem”. The two operators, Orange and Malitel, refused to comment on the subject <sup>143</sup> ■

## JANUARY 17, 2017

### **IN CAMEROON**

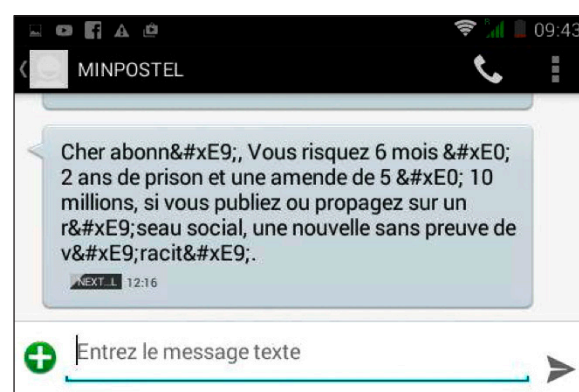
As part of a strike action of teachers and lawyers since late October 2016 to denounce the marginalization of the English-speaking regions, the Internet experienced disruptions until “the level of routing activity, i.e. the paths through which Internet data packets circulate, suddenly dropped at 8:45 pm” across the country. <sup>144</sup> According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Cf. *Annex 10: Letter from the United Nations Special*

*Rapporteurs on February 3, 2017*), the public Cameroon’s public telephony operator (CAMTEL), reportedly mobilized teams in the cities of Yaoundé, Douala, Kribi and Limbe to implement the request from the Ministry of Posts and Telecoms to cut the network. The connection was restored on January 18, except for the two English-speaking regions. Subscribers to the country’s four mobile providers, including MTN and Orange, then received a message informing them of the Internet outage, stating that the incident was “beyond their control”. <sup>145</sup>

At the same time as ordering the shutdown, the ministry in charge of communications ordered mobile operators to send an SMS to their subscribers nationwide, warning them of the risk of spreading false news on social networks, punishable by fine and imprisonment. It wasn’t until March that the government acknowledged its responsibility for the blockage, through the intermediary of the Minister of Telecommunications. <sup>146</sup>



(23)



(24)

The Internet was restored on April 20 in the English-speaking regions after 93 days of blackout. <sup>147</sup> The announcement was made by the government spokesman and Minister of Communication, Issa Tchiroma BAKARY, who declared on national radio that: “the conditions that led to the provisional ban on the Internet in this part of the national territory have greatly evolved” <sup>148</sup> ■

*“[The cuts] in 2016 with the NoSo crisis and during the presidential elections [were orchestrated] to prevent civil society from communicating with the outside world. It was necessary to use securized and expensive networks, support strategies between actors were set up with certain structures in the Littoral and Western regions. [These cuts prevented me] from working, communicating and carrying out online operations. [I felt] very bad. [My work as an activist was impacted] on an economic level, we had to pay a bit more to get the connection and that also made us very vulnerable. [The alternatives were] to use VPNs and other secure networks. [The consequences were] non-compliance with our work plans, government spying, weak relationships with our partners and very expensive access prices at those times. [I felt] betrayed by the government. I was angry. [Among the population was] resignation in the face of the state machine.”*

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**AGNÈS METOUGOU,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-CAMEROUN

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## THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN 2016

### DECEMBER 20, 2016 IN DRC

On December 15, as the end of President Joseph KABILA’s term of office approached, three operators received a letter from the Agence de Régulation des Postes et des Télécommunications du Congo (ARPTC) (Cf. Appendix 11: ARPTC letter, December 14, 2016) to restrict access to social networks “from 11:59 pm on December 18, 2016”. <sup>149</sup> The letter states that “as partial blocking will not be possible, you are therefore requested to block all full access to said social networks”. <sup>150</sup> On December 13, prior to receiving this letter, Internet operators and the government had held a meeting, at which orders were given to cut off communications, citing security reasons. <sup>151</sup> However, according to the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (BCNUDH), social networks were still active on December 19, and the cut-off only took place on December 20. <sup>152</sup> The block was lifted on December 28. ■

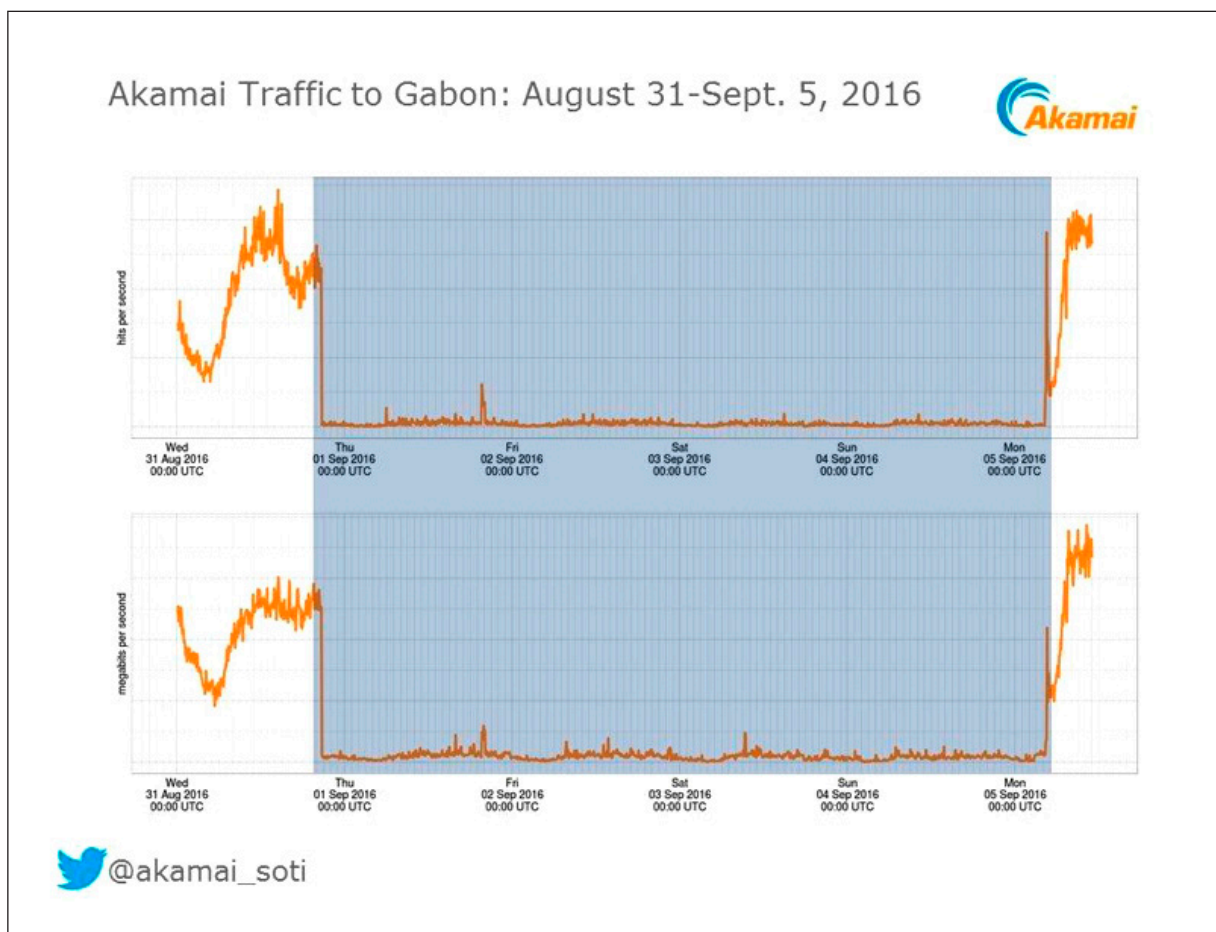
### AUGUST 28, 2016 IN GABON

The day after the presidential election, in which President Ali BONGO was elected for his second term, the bandwidth <sup>153</sup> was progressively restricted throughout the country, until it was completely cut off on August 31. The Gabonese government denied being behind the blackout in a press release issued on the night of August 28: “The Gabonese state has not taken any measures to block telecommunications and Internet networks”, while accusing opponent Jean PING of using the networks to “spread rumors and false information.”. <sup>154</sup> According to Internet Without Borders, users reported a total shutdown of the network on the evening of August 29, lasting 2.5 hours. Following the announcement of the re-election of President Ali BONGO on August 31, demonstrations denouncing electoral fraud took place. This led to a total blackout on the evening of August 31 shortly before 9 pm.

The operator Gabon Telecom “cut the connection to 91% of the country’s IP addresses and mobile Internet”.<sup>155</sup> Satellite connections remained functional. The network was finally restored at 4:30 am on September 5, after 104 hours of outage. However, the network was restored only 12 hours a day, from 6 am to 6 p.m.,<sup>156</sup> but social networks remained totally blocked. It wasn’t until September 29 that the Internet and social networks were fully accessible.<sup>157</sup> Interviewed on this subject by the Al Jazeera television channel, Ali BONGO stated that the blackout was due to Internet saturation caused by the excessive number of cell phones<sup>158</sup> (25) ■

## AUGUST 17, 2016 AU MALI

Following a demonstration in support of Mohamed Youssouf BATHILY alias Ras Bath, a radio columnist known for his criticism of the government, who was arrested on the night of August 15 to 16 for “public indecency”,<sup>159</sup> the social networks Twitter and Facebook have been blocked nationwide.<sup>160</sup> The Viber and WhatsApp messaging services have not been completely cut off, but have experienced disruptions. The government, Internet operator Orange Mali and the Malian Telecommunications and Posts Regulatory Agency (AMRTP) all denied any responsibility for the blackout.<sup>161</sup> Access to social networks was gradually restored on August 19, the day after Ras Bath<sup>162</sup> was conditionally released ■



(25) Internet outages in Gabon in 2016



## **MAY 11, 2016 IN UGANDA**

Access to social networks such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter has been shut down at the instruction of the UCC, for reasons of “*national security*”, operators MTN and Airtel Uganda announced on Twitter. <sup>163</sup> The incident comes just one day before President Yoweri MUSEVENI is due to be inaugurated for his fifth term, following a controversial re-election, and amid protests against the results. <sup>164</sup> The blackout, which comes around 20 minutes after the broadcast of a video of the main political opponent, Kizza BESIGYE, in which he takes the presidential oath, rejecting the result of the February 2016 elections, until 6 pm the next day. <sup>165 166 167</sup>

In April 2021, Unwanted Witness Uganda and Article 19 filed a lawsuit against the government and service providers for blocking social media during the 2016 election period. The court found that the restrictions were authorized by the Constitution, which permits the limitation of fundamental rights and freedoms <sup>168</sup> ■

## **APRIL 10, 2016 IN CHAD**

Chad experienced eight months of Internet disruption from April 10, the day of Idriss Déby's controversial re-election for a fifth term, to December 2, 2016. <sup>169</sup> On the day of the election, SMS messages and Internet connections were completely blocked throughout the country, with the added difficulty of making phone calls on both fixed and mobile lines. Two days later, the Internet connection was restored, but SMS communication, access to social networks such as Facebook, and online e-mail accounts were not. On the day of the announcement of the provisional election results on April 21, SMS messages were re-established, and access to social networks was also partially restored. Neither the government nor the operators have acknowledged that they are responsible for these incidents, the former stating that the blockages were due to technical problems. <sup>170</sup> In April, access to international data roaming was once again blocked, as well as the secure Blackberry mobile browser. According to the government, the cut-off is justified on security grounds, in particular to prevent terrorists

and criminals from Cameroon and Nigeria from communicating when they enter Chadian territory. <sup>171</sup> According to the 2016 Human Rights Report of the US Embassy in Chad, during the blackout, around 99% of Chadians had restricted Internet access via cell phones and between 2.7% and 10.2% had access to the Internet on computers. <sup>172</sup>

As of Friday December 2 at 1 pm, Chadians once again have full access to social networks, with operators Airtel and Tigo having received instructions from the Ministry of Security. <sup>173</sup> According to Internet Without Borders <sup>174</sup>, the 235-day blackout cost the Chadian economy more than 18 million euros. ■

## **MARCH 20, 2016 IN CONGO**

On the day of the presidential election, the authorities imposed a nationwide blackout. <sup>175</sup> At the request of the Minister of the Interior, Raymond MBOULOU, telecommunications companies were blocked for 48 hours from sending SMS messages, connecting to the Internet and using the telephone. The announcement was made on the eve of the election. The reasons given were “*national security and safety*”, officially to prevent opposition candidates from broadcasting “*illegal*” results. <sup>176</sup> According to a government source, the disruption to communications did not hinder the vote, nor the opposition's access to the results. <sup>177</sup> In particular, it prevented the opposition from photographing and sharing polling station reports with their cell phones. On March 21, the U.S. State Department issued a statement calling on the authorities to restore, among other things, communications, and highlighting irregularities in the electoral process. <sup>178</sup> Communications were finally restored after a 4-day suspension on March 24, in the morning. <sup>179</sup> ■

## **FEBRUARY 18, 2016** IN CHAD

In February 2016, Zouhoua, a high-school student whose father was a presidential candidate, was raped by young men from the presidential clan. They published a video of her on the Internet in revenge for the fact that she had told her parents about the rape. <sup>180</sup> Following this, several demonstrations were organized across the country from January 15 onwards. Largely repressed, the demonstrations left at least two people dead. Faced with such a wave of protests, the Autorité de Régulation de Communication Électronique et des Postes du Tchad (ARCEPT) <sup>181</sup> requires providers to block access to messaging services, social networks and mailbox services. <sup>182</sup> The Internet was restored on February 27, but difficulties in accessing mobile applications and certain sites remain, according to the letter sent by the Special Rapporteurs to the Chadian government on November 7, 2016 (*Cf. Annex 12: Letter from the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on November 7, 2016*). ■

## **FEBRUARY 18, 2016** IN UGANDA

On the day of the general elections, access to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp is cut off on mobile, as well as the money transfer application Mobile Money in several areas of the country. <sup>183</sup> The blackout comes as President Yoweri MUSEVENI seeks his fifth term in office. The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), the country's communication regulator, claimed to have blocked these networks for "national security" reasons during the election period: "We have disconnected but only temporarily because, as you know, this is a very sensitive period", explained UCC Director Fred OTUNNU. <sup>184</sup> The two operators most affected are MTN and Airtel. Africell operates intermittently, and the only operator fully operational is Vodafone. On February 18, MTN Uganda publicly confirmed that the UCC had ordered it to block access to social networks and Mobile Money for reasons of "privacy", "threats to public order and security". <sup>185</sup> UCC member Godfrey

MUTABAZI spoke out on the NTV Uganda television channel, saying that social networks were a means of continuing to campaign after the deadline and of corrupting voters. <sup>186</sup> The blackout lasted 4 days ■

## **THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN 2015**

### **OCTOBER 20, 2015** IN CONGO

At the time of the constitutional referendum which would allow President Denis SASSOU-NGUESSO to run for a third term, large-scale mobilizations were organized across the country, during which clashes with the forces of law and order left at least four people dead. <sup>187</sup> Internet and text messaging were suspended nationwide from 6am. In addition, the Radio France Internationale (RFI) signal was cut off. <sup>188</sup> According to Access Now, the shutdown of Congo Telecom, which connects the country to global networks, certainly had an impact on mobile network providers such as Vodacom. <sup>189</sup> The cut-off was not total, as satellite providers were still operating. The government denied being responsible for the blackouts. In particular, the Minister of Communication stated: "Maintenance is being carried out, and not just on the RFI transmitter". As for the telephone network, he pointed out the fragility of the network, which is unable to control "bottlenecks". <sup>190</sup> The blackout was only lifted on October 30 ■



## APRIL 28, 2015 **IN BURUNDI**

Messaging services and access to mobile social networks such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Tango, Telegram and Viber have been cut off in the capital Bujumbura by the Burundi Telecommunications Regulation and Control Agency (ARCT).<sup>191</sup> Fixed Internet remains operational, but reaches very few people, as the vast majority of Burundians with Internet access use it only via their cell phones. ARCT Managing Director Deogratias RURIMUNZU justified the cut-off on national security grounds.<sup>192</sup> The blackout came on the third day of demonstrations against President Pierre NKURUNZIZA's bid for a third term in office.<sup>193</sup> According to CIPESA, the blackout lasted 10 days.<sup>194</sup> ■

## MARCH 9, 2015 **IN CHAD**

Following protests by students against the compulsory wearing of motorcycle helmets in the capital N'Djaména, the government blocked the exchange of SMS messages for 24 hours. According to hospital sources, the demonstration left 3 people dead, 1 of them by the police. The justification was provided by government spokesman Bernard PADARÉ, who said: "It's to prevent on-lookers from attacking students. When there are people who can threaten public safety, well, the government can take such measures. It's a public safety measure". The SMS exchange was possible the following day, Tuesday March 10, from 6 pm.<sup>195</sup> ■

*"As far as the systematic blackouts in Chad are concerned, they happen sequentially, so Internet users in the vicinity of the town of Kousséri are forced to connect to the telephone networks in Cameroon. But the population in deep Chad is experiencing enormous difficulties."*

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**ENOCK DJERANE,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-CHAD

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## JANUARY 22, 2015 **IN NIGER**

On the morning of Thursday January 22, 2015, the government suspended the exchange of SMS messages, as well as access to the social networks Twitter and Facebook. Hassoumi MASSAOUDOU, then Minister of the Interior, defended this decision on RFI: *"We decided to block social networks to frame the day of prayer on Friday"* before adding that *"it's to avoid new outbursts that we took this decision"* and that *"it's not about censorship"*. He was referring in particular to the previous week's anti-Christian demonstrations.<sup>196</sup> While the Minister announced a cut-off until Saturday January 24 inclusive, the connection was re-established early in the afternoon of the same day, January 22, without explanation.<sup>197</sup> ■

*"I've experienced a total of 2 Internet blackouts in Niger. The first time I was a member of a trade union living in the rural commune of Abala, a locality less than 300 km from the capital. It was January 22, 2015, during the protests against Charlie Hebdo. Being far from Niamey, the blackout deprived us of some of our means of communication with our relatives living in other parts of the country, and also of being able to make certain transactions with money transfer companies that only work with the Internet. A significant percentage of our work is done via the Internet. When we no longer have 100% access to it, our work is affected, as certain tasks cannot be completed on time. It's still a sickening feeling for the majority of the population"*

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**ISMAËL HALDI,**  
MEMBER OF TLP-NIGER

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## JANUARY 20, 2015 **IN DRC**

In the aftermath of major opposition demonstrations against the revision of the electoral law, which left between four and ten people dead after the police fired live ammunition to disperse the crowds, <sup>198</sup> the Congolese authorities cut off Internet and SMS exchanges early in the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> of January nationwide. Three telecom operators, Vodacom, Millicom and Bharti Airtel, were ordered on the afternoon of January 19 to cut off Internet and SMS. A statement from Vodacom said that all the companies had complied, and that the deadline for implementing the measure was midnight the same day. <sup>199</sup> On January 22, the fixed Internet and wifi networks were restored, enabling banks and government agencies to resume their activities <sup>200</sup> but it would be almost 20 days before the blackouts were totally lifted. On February 5, government spokesman Lambert MENDE held a press conference in Kinshasa, stating that Internet connections should be restored “*within hours*”. <sup>201</sup> SMS was restored on February 7 and mobile Internet the following day, February 8. <sup>202</sup> However, while mobile access to social networks such as WhatsApp and Viber has been restored, this is not the case for other networks. Accused by the Minister of Communication of having contributed to the uprisings, access to Twitter and Facebook in particular has not been restored at the same time as the others. The government spokesman said it was only a “*matter of hours*” before they were restored <sup>203</sup> ■

*“In 2015, when civil society and the Catholic Church were contesting the non-observance of term limits, President KABILA, whose last term was due to expire in 2016, was planning to slip back into power, outside constitutional requirements. And we launched strong mobilizations, demonstrations and it was very hot just about everywhere in all the big cities of the Republic and then the power of KABILA, at that time also, had been afraid*

*because the main awareness-raising was done on social networks and (...) it is social networks that are very popular today with a large proportion of young people, and mobilization went very quickly. So they said (...) to cut off the Internet, to block access to social networks.”*

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**JEAN-CHRYSTOSTOME KIJANA,**  
TLP-DRC COORDINATOR

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## THE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN **2014**

### NOVEMBER 11, 2014 **IN CHAD**

Demonstrations were organized by high-school students who joined teachers in the towns of N'Djamena, Sarh and Moundou to denounce the cost of living (notably rising fuel prices). <sup>204</sup> Tensions with the defense and security forces left between 6 and 10 people dead and many injured. The authorities then cut off the Internet, part of the telephone network and local money transfers for eight days. No explanations were given. <sup>205</sup>

This first blackout in the country coincides with the year of promulgation of a particularly liberticidal law on electronic communications, which criminalizes the use of bypass systems such as VPNs, virtual private networks that can be used to circumvent communication blockages ■

# CONCLUSION

On January 29, 2019, the Special Rapporteur of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa declared that *"Internet and social media blackouts violate the rights to freedom of expression and access to information (...). Citizens should not be penalized by blackouts when they protest for political and economic reform, or during contested electoral processes or elections (...)"*.<sup>206</sup>

In addition to being illegal, Internet blackouts don't solve the often-emphasized problem of security, because they don't prevent illegal activity or prosecute the culprits; they simply put a smokescreen. Even if in some cases they manage to pause the transmission of certain information, this information reappears as soon as the connection is re-established. What's more, by reducing public confidence in the Internet and its transparency, they encourage the development of more obscure underground services.

Finally, they inflict immense collateral damage, particularly on the country's economy, impeding development. Internet blackouts undermine efforts to close the digital gap and the promise of accelerated economic and social development that would follow, thus compromising the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. They prevent people from participating in the discussions and decisions that shape their lives, and from contributing to building safe and prosperous societies.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## TO THE STATES

- To be transparent about the government's digital actions in order to restore people's trust
- To create resilient infrastructures with numerous interconnection points distributed throughout the whole country, making it more difficult for a government to cut off the entire network
- To identify the best practices needed to solve problems without having to cut off the Internet (cooperation between service providers and authorities to counter illegal content, raising citizens' awareness of what is legal and what is not...)
- To involve civil society in the drafting of digital laws to protect citizens
- To measure the cost of a cut and its impact on the population and infrastructures of the country

## TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES

- To use all legal means at their disposal to prevent the implementation of an Internet cut-off that has been requested of them and, if such a cut-off must nevertheless take place, prevent or mitigate as far as possible the negative effects that this measure would have on human rights
- To take all legal measures to ensure full disclosure of interference information

## TO CIVIL SOCIETY

- To monitor the impact of Internet blackouts and call on governments to be transparent and accountable about Internet outages
- To be familiar with national digital laws in order to carry out legal action
- To train civil society members in digital security to contribute to their protection

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# APPENDICES

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association; and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.**

Ref. number: UA TCD 3/2022  
(Please use this reference to answer)

November 3, 2022

Excellence,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 43/20, 51/8, 45/3, 44/5, 50/17 and 43/16.

In this context, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to information we have received **concerning serious allegations of excessive and lethal use of force in the context of demonstrations opposed to the extension of the transition period; these allegations include 80 deaths, arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances and torture of peaceful demonstrators, human rights defenders and journalists.**

We recently expressed our concerns about the violent repression of demonstrators in a press release dated October 26, 2022. A previous communication was also sent on March 3, 2022 ([TCD 2/2022](#)) concerning the use of excessive force by the forces of law and order which led to the deaths of 21 people during peaceful demonstrations in January 2022 in the province of Dar Ouaddai. We thank Your Excellency's Government for the [reply](#) received on May 11, 2022. We regret, however, that this response omits the rights of the victims and their families in accordance with Chad's international obligations, notably in terms of reparation and compensation to the victims of human rights violations, as well as the prosecution of the perpetrators of these violations. In light of these latest developments, which suggest a worrying pattern of excessive use of force, we would like to remind Your Excellency's Government that, under international human rights law, force can only be used when it is strictly necessary, proportional and lawful. We insist on the need to adopt at the highest level a zero-tolerance policy towards such acts, which amount to ill-treatment, and sometimes even torture, and are likely to result in death, by systematically, impartially and promptly investigating the alleged facts in order to bring those responsible to justice, where appropriate.



According to the information received :

Following the death of President Idriss Déby in April 2021, his son Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno succeeded him without an electoral process, beginning an 18-month transition period. On October 1, 2022, the latter announced that the presidential elections would be postponed until 2024, extending the transitional period by a further two years. This decision is said to have provoked strong protests, and on October 20, 2022, thousands of demonstrators gathered in several cities across the country to demand a swifter return to democracy.

These peaceful demonstrations were reportedly put down by elements of the security and defense forces, notably the Groupement Mobile d'Intervention de la Police (GMIP), the Gendarmerie Nationale (GN) and the Police Nationale (PN), who violently dispersed the demonstrators using tear gas and live ammunition, sometimes targeting the demonstrators directly. This excessive use of force is said to have led to the death of at least 80 demonstrators and injured hundreds more, some seriously, in N'djaména, Moundou, Doba, Koumra and Bebedjia. Many of the wounded are currently being treated in the country's hospitals and health centers, while others who have succumbed to their injuries have been transferred to morgues.

A human rights defender taking part in the demonstration was reportedly seriously injured. A young journalist was also killed while covering the demonstrations as part of his work. According to other reports, a second journalist was tortured by police at his home in the capital, N'Djaména. A dozen police officers were also killed during the clashes.

On October 21, 2022, a curfew was reportedly introduced by the government, and the activities of several political parties were suspended for three months. Disruptions to internet access were also reported, preventing access to information and the sharing of news on current events. In addition, citizens and members of political parties continued to be intimidated in the capital by the security forces. Military vehicles were also reportedly seen parked or on the move in many neighborhoods, while shots were reportedly fired in areas such as Atrone, Gasi, Walia and Moursal. Searches were also reported to have taken place in people's homes, followed by detention by the Chadian police, including of children aged 15 and under.

Hundreds of demonstrators are reported to have been arrested across the country, and there are further reports of ill-treatment and torture by members of the Chadian security forces, particularly in the towns of Abéché, Bongor, Mongo, Kyabe and Moissala.

Security forces reportedly began using schools to detain demonstrators, such as the Lycée Communal d'Abena in N'Djaména's 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Children were reportedly chased away by police officers as they tried to gain access to their classrooms. Some of those arrested were also transferred to the Koro Toro high-security prison in the north of the country, hundreds of kilometers from the capital.

It has been reported that since the start of the protests on October 20, 2022, internet access has been completely interrupted and fixed connections severely slowed, due to cuts in communication networks. In addition, similar disruptions have been reported in several cities across the country.

*Individual cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance*

██████████ a 15-year-old minor, was reportedly arrested at 7 a.m. on October 20, 2022 while walking with a friend in the Ardep Djoumal district, located in the 3<sup>rd</sup> arrondissement. Police officers reportedly took the minor to the CSP3 police station. That same evening, a relative was able to bring him food, but the family was also informed of the transfer of ██████████ to the Commissariat Central two days later. Once ██████████ were informed that he was not there. The family currently have no idea where he is. ██████████ detained and are without news.

**Ferdinand Mbairiba, Djerané Mbairiba, Koumald Mbairiba and Doimtoné Mbairiba**, from the same family, were reportedly arrested at 9 a.m. on October 20, 2022 at their home in the Habewa district of the 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Police officers reportedly took them first to the Habena school and then to the CSP2 police station. Since then, the family has reportedly heard nothing from their loved ones.

**Alladoum Israel, Djerabe Bienvenue, Djesandjim Felix, Reounoudji Gilbet, Solmengar Eric, Djerabe Vincent, Mbaiodji Verdil and Djerabe Nabodi**, members of the same family, were reportedly arrested at 9 a.m. on October 20, 2022 at their home in the Chagoua district of the 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Police officers reportedly took them to the CSP12 police station, and the following day five of them were transferred out of the station. Their families currently have no news of where they are being held.

**Manimiam Ezechiél, Mamimiam Philippe, Mamimiam Lionel, Djedouboum Mamasse and Oumar Adouan Abdoulaye**, members of the same family, were reportedly arrested at 4pm on October 20 at their home in the Moursal district, located in the 6<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Police officers reportedly first took them to the CA6 police station. They were then transferred to Camp 27 and finally transported to Moussoro, 300 kilometers from the capital. Since then, the

family would have had no further news of their loved ones.

Without wishing to prejudge the merits of these allegations, we express our grave concern, should they prove to be true, at what appears to have been an excessive use of force against unarmed, peaceful demonstrators, resulting in the death of at least 80 people and the injury, sometimes serious, of many others. We fear that, in view of these allegations, the death toll may be higher. We also express our concern at allegations of a very high number of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances of demonstrators, including minors, torture and ill-treatment, and disruption of internet access.

We respectfully remind Your Excellency's Government of the need to maintain an open and inclusive dialogue with individuals and opposition groups, human rights defenders and other elements of civil society, who are exercising their rights to freedom of expression, opinion and peaceful assembly -- rights which must be protected by the State even when these opinions differ from those of the government. We fear that the alleged circumstances will contribute to creating a climate of anger, fear and mistrust that could have a deleterious effect on public freedoms and on security and stability in Chad.

If substantiated, these allegations represent a massive violation of the right to life, the absolute prohibition of torture, ill-treatment and enforced disappearance, the right to liberty and security of person, the right not to be arbitrarily detained, as well as the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and to engage in legitimate and peaceful activities for the defense of human rights, as stipulated in articles 2 (3), 6, 7, 9, 10, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24 and 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by the Republic of Chad on June 9, 1995 ; articles 1, 2 and 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, also ratified by Chad on June 9, 1995; and the protections provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by Chad on October 2, 1990 and June 9, 1995.

In particular, we would like to draw your Excellency's Government's attention to Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person", and Article 9, which states that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. Article 6 of the same Covenant **stipulates that the right to life is inherent to the human person**, that it must be protected by law and that no one may be arbitrarily deprived of life. Under article 9 of the Covenant, no one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law.

In accordance with General Comment No. 35 of the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the jurisprudence of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, any arrest or detention intended to sanction the legitimate exercise of rights protected by the Covenant may be considered arbitrary.

in light of the allegations of enforced disappearance ██████████ Ferdinand Mbairiba, Djerané Mbairiba, Koumald Mbairiba, Doimtoné Mbairiba, Alladoum Israel, Djerabe Bienvenue, Djesandjim Felix, Reounoudji Gilbet, Solmengar Eric, Djerabe Vincent, Mbaïodji Verdil, Djerabe Nabodi, Manimiam Ezechiel, Mamimiam Philippe, Mamimiam Lionel, Djedouboum Mamasse and Oumar Adouan Abdoulaye, we refer to the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by General Assembly resolution 47/133 of 18 December 1992, in particular articles 2, 7, 9, 10, 13, 19 and 20. The prohibition of enforced disappearance, and the corresponding obligation to investigate and punish those responsible, has now attained the status of *jus cogens*.

We also refer to the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances' Guiding Principles on the Search for Missing Persons, in particular Principle 4, which stipulates that the search for missing persons must be based on a differentiated approach, paying particular attention to cases of missing children and adolescents, and to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which was signed by Chad on February 6, 2007.

In its General Comment No. 36, the Human Rights Committee recalled that the right to life is the supreme right from which no derogation is permitted, and requires States parties to the ICCPR to take special measures to protect children in vulnerable situations whose lives have been endangered by specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence (CCPR/C/GC/36, paras. 2 and 23). "Enforced disappearance constitutes a unique and integrated set of acts and omissions representing a grave threat to life" and States parties to the ICCPR must take adequate measures to prevent enforced disappearances and ensure that prompt and effective investigations are carried out to determine the fate and whereabouts of any person who may have been the victim of an enforced disappearance (para. 58).

We further recall that the failure to provide information on the fate and whereabouts of disappeared persons, as well as the official indifference of the authorities to the suffering of relatives, may constitute a form of ill-treatment, in violation of article 7, read alone and in conjunction with article 2 (3) of the ICCPR. The impossibility of obtaining the mortal remains of a loved one and performing last rites and mourning, as well as obstructions to seeking and receiving information, constitute a violation of the right to private and family life and the right to freedom to seek information, enshrined respectively in articles 17 and 19 of the ICCPR.

We refer to the General Comment on Children and Enforced Disappearances (A/HRC/WGEID/98/1) which states that children, because of their particularly vulnerable status as child victims of enforced disappearance or as relatives of a disappeared person, need enhanced protection and that States should develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to enforced disappearances of children and should pay particular attention to the prompt resolution of cases involving child victims of enforced disappearance. We also recall the thematic study of the Working Group on Disappearances

and economic, social and cultural rights (A/HRC/30/38), which states that enforced disappearance constitutes a violation of the economic, social and cultural rights of the disappeared person, his or her family and others, and that people who do not fully enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights are, in many cases, more likely to become victims of enforced disappearance (paragraph 53).

In addition, we wish to draw your Excellency's government's attention to Principle 4 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which provides specific guidance in the context of policing peaceful gatherings, as follows:

"12. Given that everyone is entitled to participate in lawful and peaceful assemblies, in accordance with the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, governments and law enforcement agencies and officials must recognize that force and firearms can only be used in accordance with principles 13 and 14.

13. When dispersing illegal but non-violent gatherings, law enforcement officials should avoid the use of force or, where this is not possible, limit such force to the minimum necessary.

14. When dispersing violent gatherings, law enforcement officials may use firearms only when less dangerous means are not feasible and only to the minimum extent necessary. Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms in such cases, except under the conditions stipulated in principle 9."

And just as important, "9. Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defense or in defense of others against an imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the commission of a particularly serious crime involving a serious threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event, the intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable to protect life."

In accordance with principle 5(c) of the above-mentioned Basic Principles, law enforcement officials must ensure that timely medical assistance is provided to any person injured as a result of the use of force or firearms. Furthermore, we also refer to the joint report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on the proper management of gatherings (A/HRC/31/66) indicating that the use of force



by the forces of law and order should be exceptional and that gatherings should normally be managed without the use of force. Any use of force must comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality (paragraph 57).

Under the aforementioned conventions, states are obliged to investigate, prosecute and punish gross human rights violations, and to provide reparation to victims. Article 2 of the ICCPR establishes that States must adopt measures to ensure that persons whose rights or freedoms are violated have an effective remedy. In this respect, we also recall that thorough, prompt, independent and impartial investigations must be carried out ex officio, and that in the event of the discovery of a body, an autopsy must be performed in accordance with the standards set out in the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, and the revised version of the *United Nations Manual on the Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Deaths Potentially Resulting from Unlawful Acts (2016))*<sup>1</sup>, in order to determine the circumstances of these deaths and, if possible, initiate the return of the bodies to family members. In this context, we offer our support to the Chadian authorities in implementing the Minnesota Protocol to bring forensic investigations into line with international standards. Furthermore, we refer to the Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on public norms and policies for the effective investigation of enforced disappearances (A/HRC/45/13/Add.3) indicating that cases of enforced disappearance should be investigated ex officio, if necessary, promptly, thoroughly, effectively and impartially (paragraph 11).

Full texts of legal instruments and other human rights standards can be found on our website at [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org). We can also provide you with these texts on request.

In view of the seriousness of these allegations, we are making this appeal in order to protect the rights of the above-mentioned persons from irreparable harm and without prejudice to any legal decision.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates entrusted to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek your cooperation in clarifying the cases that have been brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your Excellency's Government's comments on the following points:

1. Please send us any further information or comments you may have on the above allegations.
2. Please provide information on the number, name, age and sex of all persons killed, injured and who died as a result of injuries sustained as a result of the use of force by the security forces.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/MinnesotaProtocol.pdf>.

during events.

3. Please provide information on any investigations into the alleged facts, in order to determine in each case the precise circumstances in which people were killed or injured, the responsibilities for these acts, direct and supervisory, and the measures taken to punish these acts, following the procedures of the Minnesota Protocol for the Investigation of Deaths Potentially Resulting from Unlawful Acts.
4. Please provide detailed information on investigations into any allegations of torture or ill-treatment during demonstrations or following arrests of demonstrators, and on the compliance of these investigations with the procedures advised by the Istanbul Protocol.
5. Please provide detailed information on the number, name, age and sex of all persons arrested and detained during, since and in connection with the demonstrations.
6. Please provide precise information on where all arrested persons are being held, their location and the number of demonstrators held in each facility, as well as the measures taken to inform families.
7. Please provide information on investigations into all allegations of enforced disappearance, in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances' Guiding Principles on the Search for Missing Persons.
8. In particular, please clarify as soon as possible the fate and whereabouts of the following persons who may have been arrested and whose families have had no news of them [REDACTED] Ferdinand Mbairiba, Djerané Mbairiba, Koumald Mbairiba, Doimtoné Mbairiba, Alladoum Israel, Djerabe Bienvenue, Djesandjim Felix, Reounoudji Gilbet, Solmengar Eric, Djerabe Vincent, Mbaïodji Verdil, Djerabe Nabodi, Manimiam Ezechiel, Mamimiam Philippe, Mamimiam Lionel, Djedouboum Mamasse and Oumar Adouan Abdoulaye, who are still missing.
9. Please provide information on the regulations and operational procedures governing the use of force by police and other law enforcement officers in managing gatherings, and indicate to what extent they are compatible with international standards, in particular, the principle of proportionality aimed at protecting the life and physical integrity of persons.

10. Please also explain in detail and in relation to the incidents mentioned in this communication, the justification for the use of force against demonstrators and how the proportionality of these actions and the protection of the life and physical and mental integrity of the individuals concerned have been assessed.
11. Please provide information on the compatibility of the interruption of Internet services with the requirements of articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR. In particular, please provide information on the legal basis, necessity and proportionality of the measure.

We wish to inform Your Excellency's Government that after having addressed this joint communication to the Government, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may transmit the case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion as to whether or not the deprivation of liberty was arbitrary. Such communications in no way prejudice the opinion of the Working Group. The Government is required to reply separately to the joint communication and to the regular procedure.

We also wish to bring to the attention of Your Excellency's Government that if sources submit allegations of enforced disappearance mentioned in this communication as a case to the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, it will be examined by the Working Group according to its working methods, in which case Your Excellency's Government will be informed by separate correspondence.

Pending a reply from you, we request your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of the individuals mentioned, in particular to search for and reveal the fate and whereabouts of the missing persons and to prevent any irreparable damage to the life and personal integrity of the demonstrators currently detained, to carry out investigations into any violations that may have been perpetrated and to bring those responsible to justice. We also request your Government to adopt, where appropriate, all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of the events mentioned.

Finally, we wish to inform Your Excellency's Government that we may publicly express our concerns about the subject of this letter, due to the importance and seriousness of the alleged facts, which call for the highest attention of the authorities concerned. Any public expression of concern arising from our mandates will indicate that we have been in contact with you to clarify the issue(s) in question.

This communication, as well as any reply received from your Excellency's government, will be made public within 60 days on the communications [website](#). They will also subsequently be available in the usual report submitted to the Human Rights Council.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of our highest consideration.

Alice Jill Edwards  
Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or  
punishment

Mumba Malila  
Vice-Chairman of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Aua Baldé  
Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary  
Disappearances

Morris Tidball-Binz  
Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Clement Nyaletsossi Voule  
Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association

Mary Lawlor  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders



## **PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT**

**20<sup>th</sup> May, 2019**

### **USE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE 2019 TRIPARTITE ELECTIONS IN MALAWI**

The Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) wishes to appeal to the general public to exercise extra caution when using the social media in spreading messages during the country's elections period.

MACRA realises the importance of social media platforms in sharing information but reminds the general public that it is every user's responsibility to disseminate information that is credible and of benefit to the citizens of this country.

It should be noted that Malawi has not been spared from online fake news which is also a big problem for many countries. MACRA, as a regulator of the country's communications sector, is working with various stakeholders to seek ways of countering the spread of fake news.

Therefore, users of social media platforms should be vigilant by verifying the sources of the information they receive before spreading it further.

Being viral or trending does not accord fake news any accuracy.

The public is further reminded that publication of false or misleading information may attract criminal as well as civil liability.

**Godfrey Itaye**  
**Director General**



**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association; and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders**

REFERENCE:  
AL TCD 1/2018

July 27, 2018

Excellence,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association; and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 34/18, 32/32 and 34/5.

In this context, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to information we have received concerning allegations of restrictions on public freedoms, notably freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. In particular, we would like to draw your attention to allegations of bans on peaceful demonstrations in N'Djamena and the excessive use of force by police, gendarmes and military personnel against demonstrators. Lastly, we would like to draw your attention to allegations of restrictions on access to information through cuts in Internet access, access to social networks and suspensions by telephone operators, allegedly carried out on the instructions of the authorities.

The **Union Nationale des Etudiants tchadiens** is a student union that fights for students' rights and organizes peaceful demonstrations in favor of the right to education.

**Lyina** is a citizens' movement whose main activity is the promotion and protection of democracy and human rights in Chad.

According to the information received :

Between 2016 and 2018, more than 65 administrative decisions were reportedly taken by the Ministry of Public Security prohibiting the organization of peaceful marches.

On November 28, 2017, the citizen movement, *Lyina*, organized a citizen concert with local artists at the Don Bosco de Chagoua youth center in N'Djamena's 7<sup>ème</sup> arrondissement. On the day of the concert, police reportedly surrounded the premises. The organizers of the event then tried, unsuccessfully due to the heavy police presence, to hold a press conference at the Maison des Médias.

On January 22, 2018, a decree issued by the Ministry of Public Security and Immigration, had banned a demonstration organized by eight civil society organizations that was supposed to take place on January 25. Internet access was reportedly cut off the day before the demonstration.

On January 25, 2018, the police, gendarmerie and national guard reportedly dispersed the said peaceful demonstration, which nevertheless took place in N'Djamena. The security forces reportedly used water cannons and tear gas. The demonstration had been organized by eight civil society organizations to express their opposition to austerity measures and the high cost of living. Several human rights defenders who had attended the demonstration were reportedly arrested and charged with disturbing the peace and failing to comply with a prohibition order issued by the public prosecutor. In addition, a journalist was reportedly brutally attacked by two police officers during the demonstration.

On February 6, 2018, the Cadre de Concertation des Partis Politiques de l'Opposition Démocratique (CCPPOD) organized a peaceful demonstration in the 9<sup>ème</sup> arrondissement south of N'Djamena. 71 police, gendarmerie and military vehicles were reportedly deployed to dissuade demonstrators from taking part in protests. The demonstrators nevertheless decided to continue. The demonstration was brutally repressed by the forces of law and order, leaving 25 people injured, 11 of them seriously.

On the very day of the march, arrêté n°005 du 6 février 2018 was made public on national radio. The order reportedly stated that the activities of 10 political parties that had participated in the February 6 march would be suspended for a period of two months, for reasons of "disturbance of public order and incitement to violence."

On March 19, 2018, the Government reportedly ordered an Internet blackout, blocking social networking platforms and messaging apps that would continue until today.

We express our grave concern about the allegations relating to the use of violence by the forces of law and order to disperse the above-mentioned peaceful demonstrations. We are also concerned about the arrests of human rights defenders for wanting to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and their right to freedom of expression during the demonstration on January 25, 2018. These bans on demonstrations imposed by the authorities also give rise to our concern, as well as the routine use of legislative and regulatory texts restricting public gatherings (Ordinance No. 46/62 and Decree No. 193/620), associations (Ordinance No. 27/62) and the right to strike (Law No. 032/PR/2016). Incidents of internet and social network access cuts also raise our deep concerns, especially as these cuts are reportedly carried out without the population even being informed by the authorities about the reasons and duration, and outside any legal framework. Restricting the rights of peaceful assembly and expression does not

does not appear to meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality laid down in the international instruments to which Chad is a party.

These allegations seem to indicate the establishment of a climate of repression and censorship towards civil society, individuals, political parties and figures, such as those of CCPPOD, critical of the government, whether it concerns the rights of individuals to express their opinions - notably through social networks - but also to demonstrate and associate freely. We have noted a particular deterioration in restrictions on public freedoms in Chad since 2016. According to our sources, between 2016 and 2018, more than 65 decisions were taken prohibiting the organization of peaceful marches. If true, these allegations testify to a clear restriction of civic space in Chad and the authorities' violation of their international obligations to protect human rights.

In connection with the above allegations, please refer to the attached appendix, which sets out **the texts of legal instruments and other established human rights standards**.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates entrusted to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek your cooperation in clarifying the cases that have been brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your Excellency's Government's comments on the following points:

1. Please provide any additional information or comments in relation to the above allegations.
2. Please indicate the reasons for banning the demonstrations and how such bans would be compatible with the principles of necessity and proportionality, in the light of article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
3. Please indicate the legal grounds for cutting off the Internet, blocking social networking platforms and messaging applications and how these measures are compatible with article 19 of the ICCPR.
4. Please send us information about any investigations into the above-mentioned incidents of excessive use of force by law enforcement officers against peaceful demonstrators. If no investigation is underway, please explain why.
5. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that civil society and human rights defenders can work in a favourable environment and carry out their legitimate activities, in particular

to express themselves freely and demonstrate peacefully, without fear of harassment, stigmatization or criminalization of any kind.

We would be grateful to receive a reply to these questions from you within 60 days. We undertake to ensure that your Excellency's Government's response will be reflected in the report we submit to the Human Rights Council for consideration.

Pending a reply from you, we request your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of the individuals mentioned, to carry out investigations into any violations that may have been perpetrated and to bring those responsible to justice. We also request your Government to adopt, where appropriate, all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of the events mentioned.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of our highest consideration.

David Kaye

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of  
opinion and expression

Clement Nyaletsossi Voule

Special Rapporteur on the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association

Michel Forst

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

## **Appendix**

### **References to legal instruments and other established human rights standards**

In relation to the facts alleged above, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to the provisions of articles 9, 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Chad acceded on June 9, 1995, guaranteeing the right to liberty and security of person, the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association.

In particular, we recall that article 19 paragraph 3 and articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR provide that, if they exist, restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association must be provided for by law, and must be strictly necessary and proportional.

We would like to remind your Excellency's Government of Resolution 12/16 of the Human Rights Council, which calls on States to refrain from imposing restrictions which are not in conformity with Article 19 (3), including with regard to government policies and political debate, but also to impose restrictions concerning the possibility of reporting on human rights, engaging in peaceful demonstrations or political activities, including for peace or democracy; or concerning freedom of expression or opinion, religion or belief, including on the part of persons belonging to minorities or vulnerable groups.

We would also like to remind you of the provisions of Human Rights Council Resolution 24/5, which reminds States of their obligation to fully respect and protect the right of all individuals to peaceful assembly and to freedom of association, in particular on the occasion of elections, including persons professing minority or dissenting opinions or beliefs, and their obligation to ensure that any restrictions imposed on the free exercise of the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association comply with their obligations under international human rights law.

We wish to reiterate certain principles established by the Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly in Africa. In particular, the general application of restrictions on demonstrations is permitted only as a last resort, if such prohibition complies with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, and if it is in the legitimate public interest in a democratic society (para. 83).

We would also like to draw your Excellency's Government's attention to the fundamental principles set out in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and



in particular articles 1 and 2, which provide that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels" and that "Every State has the primary responsibility and duty to protect, promote and fulfil all human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular by adopting the necessary measures to create the social, economic, political and other conditions and legal safeguards required to ensure that all persons under its jurisdiction, individually and in association with others, can enjoy all those rights and freedoms in practice.

Similarly, we would like to draw your Excellency's Government's attention to the following provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders: Article 6, b) and c), which provides that everyone has the right freely to publish, impart to others or disseminate ideas, information and knowledge concerning all human rights and fundamental freedoms; to study, discuss, evaluate and assess the observance of these rights; and Article 8, para. 1, which provides for the right to effective, non-discriminatory access to participation in public life.



*Le Ministre*

Kinshasa, le 30 DEC 2017

N°CAB/MIN/PTNTIC/EON/IA/Mnw/0234/2017

Concerne: Suspension de fourniture  
des services Internet  
et SMS

A Monsieur le Directeur Général  
AFRICEL Congo  
à Kinshasa/Gombe

Monsieur le Directeur Général,

Pour des raisons de sécurité d'Etat et ce, conformément au prescrit de l'article 46 de Loi-cadre n°012/2002 du 16 octobre 2002 sur les télécommunications en République Démocratique du Congo, il vous est demandé de suspendre à partir de ce samedi 30 décembre 2017 à 18 heures jusqu'à nouvel ordre la fourniture des services ci-après :

- SMS ;
- Internet.

Une réunion d'évaluation de l'exécution de cette mesure sera tenue ce lundi 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2018 à 13 heures précises à mon cabinet afin de décider éventuellement de sa levée. A cette rencontre, il est exigé la présence de la plus haute représentation de votre société, qui pourra se faire assister d'un expert.

Je vous prie de croire, Monsieur le Directeur Général, en l'assurance de ma parfaite considération.

Emery OKUNDJI'NDJOVU



**Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.**

REFERENCE:  
UA CMR 4/2017

November 10, 2017

Excellence,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 33/30, 35/15, 34/18, 32/32, 34/5, 34/6 and 34/19.

In this context, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to information we have received concerning **allegations of torture, excessive use of force by law enforcement officers, as well as violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, during demonstrations that have taken place since November 2016, and, in particular, on 1<sup>er</sup> October 2017. On that date, at least ten people were reportedly killed, several dozen injured and arrested.**

The situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon was the subject of three urgent Special Procedures appeals, dated December 16, 2016 (UA CMR 2/2016), February 3 (AL CMR 2/2017) and February 10, 2017 (UA CMR 3/2017). We thank Your Excellency's Government for the response sent on January 27, 2017 to communication UA CMR 2/2016. However, in view of the alleged facts, the response elements provided seem insufficient to us and we would be grateful for further clarification. Furthermore, we regret that we have not received a response to the other two communications sent.

According to the information received :

Since late September 2017, the situation in the English-speaking regions has worsened, with demonstrators from the English-speaking population protesting against what is perceived as the Government's impassivity in listening to their grievances.

On September 28, 2017, on the eve of a movement of mass demonstrations scheduled for October 1, regional authorities in the English-speaking southwest region reportedly took a range of measures to hamper the protests, including bans on travel from one region to another, bans on meetings of more than four people in public spaces, the cutting of internet connections for two days and complete blockades of access to social networks such as Twitter, Whatsapp and Facebook, as well as the generalization of the curfew already in place in the northwest.

On October 1, 2017, the anniversary of the unification of the French-speaking and English-speaking parts of Cameroon, leaders of the English-speaking population organized a series of demonstrations in the country and abroad to proclaim the creation of the new state of "Ambazonia". During the uprisings, large security forces were reportedly deployed, notably in Buea and Bamenda, including troops from the Cameroonian army's Rapid Intervention Brigade. During the clashes between the population and the security forces, at least ten people were killed in the North-West region, with some sources reporting seventeen. Many others were injured and some arrested by security and defense forces.

Since the beginning of the crisis, many people have been arrested and arbitrarily detained for taking part in the demonstrations. Several of them are reportedly still in detention. On 22 August 2010, the authorities reportedly obliged the National Commission to obtain authorization from the Ministry of Defense prior to any visit to the English-speaking detention center in Yaoundé, before completely banning it. It should be noted that some individuals have reportedly been charged under Law n°2014/028 on the repression of acts of terrorism in Cameroon and the violation of State security, adopted on December 23, 2014 as part of the fight against Boko Haram, article 2 of which provides for the death penalty. Reports indicate acts of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees, which appear to be widespread in the case of individuals charged with terrorism under the aforementioned law. Moreover, persons tried under this law are subject to the jurisdiction of military courts.

While denouncing the alleged acts of violence by some demonstrators, we express our grave concerns about allegations of torture, excessive use of force during demonstrations resulting in the death of at least ten demonstrators, as well as allegations of undue restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly through the banning of demonstrations, arbitrary arrests and detentions. These actions by the authorities appear to be directly linked to the political opposition status of certain participants and/or their critical stance towards the Government and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Finally, we are deeply concerned about allegations of marginalization and discrimination against the English-speaking minority. Allegations concerning this last point

These allegations, if true, would contravene Cameroon's international obligations, in particular those relating to the protection of the right to life, guaranteed by article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ratified by Cameroon on June 27, 1984, and article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) ratified on June 20, 1989. These allegations would also contravene the provisions concerning the exercise of the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and the right to engage in legitimate and peaceful activities in defence of human rights, guaranteed by articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR; 9 (2) and 21 of the ACHPR. These alleged facts would also be in violation of the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment as codified in articles 2 and 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

With regard to the people arrested during the demonstrations, without wishing at this stage to comment on the facts that have been submitted to us, or on whether or not their detention was arbitrary, we appeal to your Government to ensure that the rights of these people are respected and that they are not arbitrarily deprived of their freedom or of a fair trial. These rights are protected by articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With regard to potential death sentences for terrorism, we would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government that Article 6 (2) of the ICCPR provides that countries which have not abolished the death penalty may impose it only for the most serious crimes. This provision has always been interpreted by the Human Rights Committee as meaning that the death penalty can only be imposed for offences which result in the loss of life. The Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/79/Add.25) noted in its concluding observations on the periodic report under the Covenant that the imposition of the death penalty for crimes which do not result in loss of life is incompatible with the Covenant. As pointed out by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, these considerations are reflected in the interpretation given today by international law, which limits the scope of the "most serious crimes" to intentional crimes resulting in death, in other words to intentional homicides (A/HRC/4/20, paras. 54-62 and 66).

We would also like to point out that Article 5 of the United Nations' safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty provides that capital punishment may only be carried out pursuant to a final judgment rendered by a competent court after legal proceedings affording all possible guarantees of a fair trial, guarantees at least equal to those set out in Article 14 of the ICCPR. Furthermore, we recall that military tribunals and other exceptional jurisdictions are not adapted to ensure full respect for the guarantees of the right to a fair trial required in capital cases (E/CN.4/1996/40, par. 107).



Finally, these allegations appear to contravene the State's primary responsibility and duty to protect, promote and fulfil all human rights and fundamental freedoms, according to the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of March 8, 1999, in particular articles 1, 2, 5, 6 and 12.

We would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of the international standards for the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, in particular the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, articles 1, 2.2, 2.3, 4.1. and 4.5.

The report of the independent expert on minority issues following her mission to Cameroon (2013) reports that many in Bamenda expressed a sense of general discrimination against anglophones, particularly in areas such as the civil service and political responsibilities. Some claimed that, even in English-speaking regions, it was common for French speakers to be appointed to positions of responsibility in the civil service, under decisions that some perceived as deliberate and politically motivated (A/HRC/25/56/Add.1, paras. 68-74).

The full texts of legal instruments and other established human rights standards can be found on our website at [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org). We can also provide you with these texts on request.

In view of the urgency of the case, we would be grateful if Your Excellency's Government could provide us with a response on the preliminary steps taken to protect the rights of the persons concerned by the above-mentioned allegations.

As it is our responsibility, by virtue of the mandates entrusted to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek your cooperation in clarifying the cases that have been brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your Excellency's Government's observations on the following points:

1. Please provide us with any additional information or comments in relation to the above allegations.
2. Please provide information on allegations of excessive use of force during demonstrations and the extent to which actions taken by law enforcement agencies are proportionate and necessary, in accordance with international standards, in particular article 21 of the ICCPR. Please provide any information on

3. Please provide detailed information on arrests made during these demonstrations. In particular, please indicate the number of people arrested, the legal basis for the arrests and any legal action taken. Please also explain the measures taken to ensure effective and impartial investigations.
4. Please provide information on any disruption to the telephone and internet networks, and explain how this measure complies with international standards, in particular article 19 of the ICCPR.

In view of the urgency of the matter, and pending a reply from you, **we request your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to put an end to the violations reported in the present communication**, to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of the individuals mentioned, to expedite investigations into the alleged violations and to bring those responsible to justice. We also request your Government to adopt, where appropriate, all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of the events mentioned.

In view of the seriousness of the alleged acts, we intend to express our concerns publicly in the very near future. We also consider that the information received is sufficiently reliable to signal a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that public opinion should be informed of the potential repercussions of the alleged facts. The press release will indicate that we have contacted Your Excellency's Government to clarify the matter in question.

We are committed to ensuring that your Excellency's Government's response is reflected in the report to be submitted to the Human Rights Council for consideration.

Finally, we would like to point out that after having sent an urgent appeal to the Government, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention can also deal with the case under its ordinary procedure in order to issue an opinion on whether or not the deprivation of liberty constitutes arbitrary detention. Recourse to the urgent action procedure, which is purely humanitarian in nature, in no way prejudices the opinion that the Working Group may issue. The Government is required to submit separate replies for the urgent action procedure and for the ordinary procedure.

~~Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention~~  
Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Agnes Callamard  
Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

David Kaye  
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Annalisa Ciampi  
Special Rapporteur on the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association

Michel Forst  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Fernand de Varennes  
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Nils Melzer  
Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

## **PRESS RELEASE**

The Minister of Posts and Telecommunications hereby informs the general public that :


Information circulating on social media for some time, claims that the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications intends to proceed with a cut off of Internet in the Southwest and Northwest Regions in the coming days.

The Minister of Posts and telecommunications categorically rejects these allegations and strongly condemns before the national and international opinion those abuses and manipulations of irresponsible users of social media.

The minister of Posts and Telecommunications reminds the general public that the President of the Republic, his Excellency Paul Biya, always advocates a Cameroonian society where the rule of law is respected in accordance with the laws in force.

The Minister of Posts and Telecommunications reiterates that her Government department has taken actions under the auspices of the Prime Minister, Head of Government and in line with the High Instructions of the Head of State.

The Minister of Posts and Telecommunications seizes this unfortunate opportunity to appeal to the vigilance and the sense of citizenship of all Cameroonians.



**BAUYE**  
**Mme Libemile Likong**  
**née Mendozo Minette**

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues**

REFERENCE:  
AL CMR 1/2018

April 25, 2018

Excellence,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 34/18 and 34/6.

In this context, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to information we have received concerning the blocking of internet access in Cameroon.

The situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon was the subject of four previous communications from the Special Procedures, dated December 16, 2016 (UA CMR 2/2016); February 3, 2017 (AL CMR 2/2017); February 10, 2017 (UA CMR 3/2017); and November 10, 2017 (UA CMR 4/2017). We thank Your Excellency's Government for the response sent on January 27, 2017 to communication UA CMR2/2016.

According to the information received :

Since November 2016, protests have reportedly been organized against the government's discrimination and marginalization of the country's English-speaking minority. These protests reportedly led to the blocking of internet access in all or part of the country between January 17, 2017 and April 20, 2017. This ban on internet access was reportedly justified on security grounds.

In the wake of these protests and following several incidents, Internet access is said to have been partially cut off, or at least severely disrupted, in the English-speaking regions of the northwest and southwest since September 22, 2017 and to this day, despite presumably your government's commitment in September 2017 not to proceed with Internet shutdowns in these regions.

On January 17, 2018, Internet access was reportedly partially restored for a short period in the English-speaking southwest region, on the occasion of an official delegation's visit to the area.

We express our serious concerns about the internet disruptions which constitute disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression and the rights of the country's English-speaking minority, and appear to have been implemented without any

legal basis. Serious concerns are expressed about the disruptions ordered to suppress public protest and political criticism in the English-speaking regions.

The above allegations appear to contravene Cameroon's international obligations concerning the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by article 19 and the linguistic and cultural rights of the English-speaking minority as guaranteed by article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ratified by Cameroon on June 27, 1984. We recall that any restriction on freedom of expression must comply with the provisions of the ICCPR, and may only be imposed for the legitimate reasons set out in articles 19(3). We further express concern that these disruptions do not appear to be necessary to protect national security, public order or a legitimate objective. The disruptions are crippling a vital means of communication for thousands of Caméronians, as well as their access to health and emergency resources and services, and also severely hampering economic life.

In this context, we would like to remind your Excellency's Government of Resolution 32/13 of the Human Rights Council, which "unequivocally condemns measures aimed at preventing or deliberately disrupting access to or dissemination of information online, in violation of international human rights law, and calls upon all States to refrain from and end such practices" (A/HRC/RES/32/13).

The joint statement by the UN and regional experts on freedom of expression also stresses that Internet blackouts or "kill switches" are measures that can in no way be justified under international human rights law.

We would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of Resolution 362 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which expresses its concern at "the emerging practice of States Parties of interrupting or limiting access to telecommunication services such as the Internet, social media and messaging services, particularly during election periods". The Commission also calls on "States parties to respect and take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect the right of citizens to freedom of information and expression through access to Internet services" (ACHPR/Res.362(LIX)2016).

The report of the previous independent expert on minority issues following her mission to Cameroon in 2013 refers to the feeling of general discrimination against the English-speaking minority in the country, particularly in areas such as the civil service and political responsibilities. The report also highlights the dominance of the French language within the Government and administration, despite the Government's commitment to promoting a policy of bilingualism (A/HRC/25/56/Add.1, paragraphs 72 and 73).



We would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of the obligations of States to protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities as set out in the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and in particular article 1 of the Declaration which establishes the obligation of States to protect the existence and identity of national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities within their territories and to adopt appropriate measures to achieve this objective; article 2.2, which stipulates that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate fully in economic and public life, and article 2.3, which emphasizes the right of persons belonging to minorities to participate effectively in decisions at national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation. In addition, States are required to ensure that persons belonging to minorities can exercise their human rights without discrimination and in full equality before the law (article 4.1), and States should also consider appropriate measures to ensure that persons belonging to minorities can participate fully in the economic progress and development of their country (article 4.5).

Finally, we would like to point out that the reports of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression conclude that online and offline limitations follow the same criteria as those mentioned above.

In connection with the above allegations, please refer to the attached annex, which sets out **the texts of legal instruments and other established human rights standards**.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates entrusted to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek your cooperation in clarifying the cases that have been brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your Excellency's Government's comments on the following points:

1. Please provide us with any additional information or comments in relation to the above allegations.
2. Please provide any information and legal grounds that would justify the disruptions recorded since February 2016.
3. Please indicate how such disruption would be compatible with article 19(3) of the ICCPR and the conditions of legality, necessity and proportionality.
4. Please give details of the measures taken, and their implementation, to ensure respect for and promotion of the civil, political, economic and socio-cultural rights of all persons present on the site.

the territory of Cameroon, without discrimination based on origin or membership of an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority.

We would be grateful to receive a reply to these questions from you within 60 days. We pledge that the response of Your Excellency's Government will be reflected in the report we submit to the Human Rights Council for consideration.

Pending a reply from you, we request your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of the individuals mentioned, to carry out investigations into any violations that may have been perpetrated and to bring those responsible to justice. We also request your Government to adopt, where appropriate, all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of the events mentioned.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of our highest consideration.

David Kaye  
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Fernand de Varennes  
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

## **Appendix**

### **References to legal instruments and other established human rights standards**

In relation to the facts alleged above, we draw your Government's attention to the right to freedom of expression, guaranteed by article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Cameroon ratified on January 27, 1984, and article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, ratified on June 20, 1989. In particular, article 19(3) of the ICCPR states that restrictions on freedom of expression must be prescribed by law, be necessary for the protection of a legitimate aim, and be a proportionate means of protecting the aim.

In this context, we would like to remind your Excellency's Government of Resolution 32/13 of the Human Rights Council, which "unequivocally condemns measures aimed at preventing or deliberately disrupting access to or dissemination of information online, in violation of international human rights law, and calls upon all States to refrain from and end such practices" (A/HRC/RES/32/13).

The joint statement by the UN and regional experts on freedom of expression also stresses that Internet blackouts or "kill switches" are measures that can under no circumstances be justified under international human rights law.

We would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of Resolution 362 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which expresses its concern at "the emerging practice of States Parties of interrupting or limiting access to telecommunication services such as the Internet, social media and messaging services, particularly during election periods". The Commission also calls on "States parties to respect and take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect the right of citizens to freedom of information and expression through access to Internet services" (ACHPR/Res.362(LIX)2016).

Finally, we would like to point out that the reports of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression conclude that online and offline limitations follow the same criteria as those mentioned above.

**Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression**

REFERENCE:  
UA TGO 1/2017

September 28, 2017

Excellence,

I have the honor of addressing you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 34/18.

In this context, I would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to information I have received concerning the **blocking of access to social networks and applications, as well as other Internet disruptions in Togo.**

According to the information received :

Since August 2017, protests have reportedly been organized against a bill to revise articles 52, 59 and 60 of the Constitution, which provides for term limits and two-round voting.

On September 5, 2017, mobile Internet access was reportedly disrupted and the population was unable to access social networking applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook, and other Internet services.

Telecommunications services were also disrupted, and people were unable to send or receive messages or make calls outside the country.

On September 10, mobile Internet and telecommunications services were restored.

The impact on citizens and businesses of the Internet blackout between September 5 and 10 is estimated to have cost between USD 1,700,000 and USD 2,700,000.

On September 19, access to WhatsApp was reportedly blocked and Internet access was also disrupted. These disruptions are still ongoing. No justification or legal basis was presented to justify these measures.

Before outlining my concerns regarding these disturbances, I would like to draw your Government's attention to the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Togo on May 24, 1984, and article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, ratified on December 5, 1982. In particular, article 19(3) of the ICCPR states that

restrictions on freedom of expression must be prescribed by law, be necessary for the protection of a legitimate aim, and be a proportionate means of protecting that aim.

In this context, I would like to remind your Excellency's Government of Resolution 32/13 of the Human Rights Council, which "unequivocally condemns measures aimed at preventing or deliberately disrupting access to or dissemination of information online, in violation of international human rights law, and calls upon all States to refrain from and end such practices" (A/HRC/RES/32/13).

I would also like to refer to the Joint Declaration of the UN and regional experts on freedom of expression, which stresses that Internet blackouts or "kill switches" are measures that can in no way be justified under international human rights law.

I would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of Resolution 362 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, expressing its concern about "the emerging practice of States Parties to interrupt or limit access to telecommunication services such as the Internet, social media and messaging services, particularly during election periods". The Commission also calls on "States parties to respect and take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect the right of citizens to freedom of information and expression through access to Internet services" (ACHPR/Res.362(LIX)2016).

Finally, I would like to point out that the reports of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression conclude that limitations to online freedom of expression follow the same criteria as those mentioned above for offline restrictions.

Finally, I would like to express my serious concerns about the Internet disruptions, which constitute disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression, and appear to have been put in place without any legal basis. I also have serious concerns about the disruptions aimed at suppressing public demonstrations and muzzling political criticism of the bill. These disruptions are hampering a vital means of communication for the people of Togo.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandate entrusted to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek your cooperation in clarifying the cases that have been brought to my attention, I would be grateful for your Excellency's Government's comments on the following points:

1. Please me for any any information or any comments in relation to the aforementioned allegations.

2. Please provide any information and legal grounds that would justify the disruptions experienced since August.
3. Please indicate how such disturbances would be compatible with Article 19(3) of the ICCPR and the conditions of legality, necessity and proportionality.

I would be grateful if you could reply to these questions within 60 days.

Pending a reply from you, I request your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the right to freedom of expression in the country. I also request your Government to adopt, where appropriate, all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of the events mentioned.

I intend, in the very near future, to express my concerns publicly, as I consider that the information received is sufficiently reliable to signal a matter warranting immediate attention. I also believe that public opinion should be informed of the potential repercussions of the alleged facts. The press release will indicate that I have contacted Your Excellency's Government to clarify the matter in question.

I pledge that your Excellency's Government's response will be reflected in the report I submit to the Human Rights Council.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

David Kaye  
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression





ARPTC

République Démocratique du Congo  
Présidence de la République  
Autorité de Régulation de la Poste et des  
Télécommunications du Congo  
Numéro Impôt : A 0704980 X

*Le Président*

Kinshasa, 07 AOUT 2017

N/réLa°ARPTC/PRES/503/2017

A Monsieur le Directeur Général  
de la société ORANGE  
à Kinshasa/Gombe

Concerne : Mesures préventives à prendre face à l'usage abusif  
des réseaux sociaux

Monsieur le Directeur Général,

En vue de prévenir les échanges abusifs des images  
via les réseaux sociaux entre abonnés de votre réseau, je vous prie de prendre  
des réceptions de la présente, les mesures techniques préventives susceptibles de  
réduire au strict minimum la capacité de transmission des images.

Les réseaux sociaux concernés sont les suivants :

- Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Google +, Baidu tieba, Skype, Viber
- Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tagged, Badoo, Myspace, Youtube, Videos, Buzznet, Meetup, Snapfish, Imo

Vous recevrez, par la même voix, l'instruction de  
revenir à la normale dès que possible.

Veillez agréer, Monsieur le Directeur Général,  
l'expression de nos sentiments distingués.



Oscar MANIKUNDA MUNATA

Sigle social : Building Gouvernance 2<sup>ème</sup> étage, Boulevard du 30 Juin - Kinshasa-Gombe/R.D.Congo  
Tél : +243 830054248, +243 123102328  
Site web : [www.arptc.cd](http://www.arptc.cd) E-mail : [info@arptc.cd](mailto:info@arptc.cd) - R.P. 3000 KIN 1

**Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression**

REFERENCE:  
AL CMR 2/2017

February 3, 2017

Excellence,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 25/2.

In this context, I would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to information I have received concerning the blocking of Internet access in Cameroon.

According to the information received :

Since November 2016, protests have reportedly been organized against the government's discrimination and marginalization of the country's English-speaking population.

On January 17, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MINPOSTEL) reportedly ordered mobile and internet service providers to block internet access nationwide.

From January 17 at 20:30 to January 18 at 01:30, Cameroon's public telephony operator (CAMTEL) mobilized teams in the cities of Yaounde, Douala, Kribi and Limbe to implement the request of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. At around 22:10 on January 17, the Internet was completely blocked throughout the country.

On the morning of January 18, internet service was restored in several parts of the country, but remained disconnected in the northwest and southwest regions. These are English-speaking regions.

The authorities also reportedly instructed mobile service providers to send SMS messages to their subscribers, warning them against posting information on social networking sites. These messages were of the type:

*"Dear subscriber, you risk 6 months to 2 years in prison and a fine of 5 to 10 million, if you publish or propagate on a social network, a news without proof of veracity".*

*"Dear subscriber, don't make yourself an accomplice to the disinformation and destabilization of our country via social networks".*

Before explaining my concerns about these disturbances, I would like to draw your Government's attention to the right to freedom of expression, guaranteed by article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Cameroon ratified on January 27, 1984, and article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, ratified on June 20, 1989. In particular, article 19(3) of the ICCPR states that restrictions on freedom of expression must be prescribed by law, be necessary for the protection of a legitimate aim, and be a proportionate means of protecting the aim.

In this context, I would like to remind your Excellency's Government of Resolution 32/13 of the Human Rights Council, which "unequivocally condemns measures aimed at preventing or deliberately disrupting access to or dissemination of information online, in violation of international human rights law, and calls upon all States to refrain from and end such practices" (A/HRC/RES/32/13).

The joint statement by the UN and regional experts on freedom of expression also stresses that Internet blackouts or "kill switches" are measures that can under no circumstances be justified under international human rights law.

I would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of Resolution 362 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which expresses its concern at "the emerging practice of States Parties of interrupting or limiting access to telecommunication services such as the Internet, social media and messaging services, particularly during election periods". The Commission also calls on "States parties to respect and take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect the right of citizens to freedom of information and expression through access to Internet services" (ACHPR/Res.362(LIX)2016).

Finally, I would like to point out that the reports of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression conclude that online and offline limitations follow the same criteria as those mentioned above.

I express my serious concerns about internet disruptions which constitute disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression, and appear to have been put in place without any legal basis. Serious concerns are expressed about the disruptions ordered to suppress public protest and political criticism in the English-speaking regions of the country. I also express concern that these disruptions do not appear to be necessary to protect national security, public order or a legitimate objective. The disruptions are crippling a vital means of communication for thousands of Cameroonians, as well as their access to health and emergency resources and services. Finally, I express my concern about the criminal penalties expressed in SMS messages, which discourage expression on the Internet.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandate entrusted to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek your cooperation in clarifying the cases that have been brought to my attention, I would be grateful for your Excellency's Government's comments on the following points:

1. Please send me any further information or comments you may have on the above allegations.
2. Please provide any information and legal grounds that would justify the disruptions recorded since February 2016.
3. Please indicate how such disturbances would be compatible with article 19(3) of the ICCPR and the conditions of legality, necessity and proportionality.

I would be grateful if you would reply to these questions within 60 days.

Pending a reply from you, I request your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of expression in the country. I also request your Government to adopt, where appropriate, all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of the events mentioned.

I intend, in the very near future, to express my concerns publicly, as I consider that the information received is sufficiently reliable to signal a matter warranting immediate attention. I also believe that public opinion should be informed of the potential repercussions of the alleged facts. The press release will indicate that I have contacted Your Excellency's Government to clarify the matter in question.

I undertake to ensure that your Excellency's Government's response is reflected in the report that I will submit to the Human Rights Council for consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

David Kaye  
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression



ARPTC

**République Démocratique du Congo**  
**Présidence de la République**  
**Autorité de Régulation de la Poste et des**  
**Télécommunications du Congo**  
Numéro Impôt : A 0704980 X

*Le Président*

Kinshasa, le 14 DEC 2016

N/réf.n°ARPTC/PRES/ DTT

A Monsieur le Directeur Général

a KINSHASA/COMBO

Concerne : Suspension momentanée des Réseaux Sociaux

Monsieur le Directeur Général,

Par la présente, nous vous demandons de bien vouloir instruire vos services techniques compétents, afin de procéder au blocage momentané de tous les échanges d'images, des vidéos et de la voix via réseaux. De façon non exhaustive, il s'agit de : Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, Baidu Tieba, Skype, Viber, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tagged, Badoo, Myspace, Youtube, Video, Buzznet, Flickr, Meetup, Snapfish, imo.

Cette instruction devra entrer en application à dater du 18 décembre 2016 à partir de 23h 59'.

Dans la mesure où le blocage partiel des services suscités ne sera pas possible, il vous est demandé dès lors de bloquer tout accès intégral audits réseaux sociaux.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur le Directeur Général, l'expression de nos sentiments distingués.

Oscar MANIKUNDA MUSATA



**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and of the Special Rapporteur on the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association**

REFERENCE:  
AL TCD 3/2016

November 7, 2016

Excellence,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and Special Rapporteur on the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 25/2 and 24/5.

In this context, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to information we have received concerning the blocking of access to social networks and mobile applications, as well as other disruptions to internet and telecommunications services.

According to the information received :

In February 2016, a video of the rape of a young woman was reportedly shared on social networks, triggering several protests.

In response to this incident, on February 18, 2016, the authorities reportedly instructed mobile and internet service providers to block access to various social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), web mail platforms (such as Gmail and Yahoo), and chat applications (such as Viber and WhatsApp).

On February 27, 2016, internet access was reportedly largely restored, but users were encountering difficulties accessing certain websites, mobile platforms and applications.

On April 9, 2016, the day of the presidential election, a power cut reportedly hit the entire country. Mobile and landline internet access, as well as SMS, were reportedly blocked across the country. Users also reportedly experienced difficulties accessing fixed-line and mobile telephony. On the same day, several users were also reported to have experienced difficulties making calls, whether by fixed line or mobile.

On April 11, 2016, access to the internet and telecommunications was partially restored. However, access to certain social networks, applications and SMS messages was reportedly blocked until April 29, 2016.



Since May 9, 2016, access to social networks and mobile applications, would remain blocked. No justification or legal basis would have been presented to justify the disruptions mentioned.

We express serious concerns about the disruptions to the internet and telephone networks, which constitute disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression, and appear to have been implemented without any legal basis. In particular, we express concern that these disruptions appear to have been organized and implemented in an arbitrary manner. We further express concern that these disruptions do not appear to be necessary to protect national security, public order or a legitimate objective.

In connection with the above allegations, please refer to the attached appendix, which sets out **the texts of legal instruments and other established human rights standards**.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates entrusted to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek your cooperation in clarifying the cases that have been brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your Excellency's Government's comments on the following points:

1. Please provide us with any additional information or comments in relation to the above allegations.
2. Please provide us with any information and legal grounds that would justify the disruptions recorded since February 2016.
3. Please indicate how such disturbances would be compatible with article 19(3) of the ICCPR and the conditions of legality, necessity and proportionality.

We would be grateful if you could reply to these questions within 60 days.

Pending a reply from you, we request your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals, to investigate any violations that may have been perpetrated and to bring those responsible to justice. We also request your Government to adopt, where appropriate, all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of the events mentioned.

We are committed to ensuring that your Excellency's Government's response is reflected in the report we submit to the Human Rights Council for consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of our highest consideration.

Rapporteur spécial sur la promotion et la protection du droit à la liberté d'opinion et  
d'expression

Maina Kiai

Rapporteur spécial sur le droit de réunion pacifique et la liberté d'association

## Appendix

### References to legal instruments and other established human rights standards

In relation to the facts alleged above, we would like to draw your Government's attention to the right to freedom of expression, guaranteed by article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Chad ratified on June 9, 1995, as well as article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. In particular, article 19(3) of the ICCPR states that restrictions on freedom of expression must be prescribed by law, be necessary for the protection of a legitimate aim, and be a proportionate means of protecting the aim.

In this context, we would like to remind your Excellency's Government of Resolution 32/13 of the Human Rights Council, which "unequivocally condemns measures aimed at preventing or deliberately disrupting access to information or the dissemination of information online, in violation of international human rights law, and calls upon all States to refrain from such practices and to put an end to them" (A/HRC/RES/32/13).

We would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of the Joint Declaration of the UN and regional experts on freedom of expression, which stresses that Internet blackouts or "kill switches" are measures that can under no circumstances be justified under international human rights law. Finally, we would like to point out that the reports of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression conclude that online and offline limitations follow the same criteria as those mentioned above.





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