

# CHAD ADDED TO CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST

## OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS





Internet restrictions, bans on and repression of protests, suspension of media outlets and arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders and journalists are regular civic space violations in Chad. However, in the run-up to the presidential elections, which took place on 11th April 2021, and following the military takeover which ensued after the death of President Idriss Déby Itno on 20th April 2021, civic space violations increased at an alarming pace.

Just days after the official announcement of President Déby's victory in the April 2021 presidential elections, on 20th April 2021, Chad's military [declared](#) that President Déby had been mortally wounded in combat and that a Transitional Military Council, led by the late President's son, General Mahamat Idriss Déby, had been installed. The Military Council further announced that the National Assembly and the government were dissolved and the Constitution suspended with the promise that elections are to be held after a 18 month transitional period. In early May 2021, the military junta appointed a transitional government.

## RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Authorities routinely ban protests, particularly protests organised by civil society and the opposition. Security forces have repeatedly used excessive force to disperse peaceful protesters. At least 16 people were [killed](#) and over 700 people arrested in protests, organised by a coalition of civil society actors and opposition groups, *Wakit Tama*, to demand a return to civilian rule between 27th April and 19th May 2021 in Chad's capital N'Djamena, and Moundou. Many of those arrested were later released. Prior to the presidential elections in February and March 2021, authorities [cracked down](#) on protests against President Déby's decision to run for a sixth term, including by arresting protesters and using excessive force against them.

## ARBITRARY ARREST AND JUDICIAL HARASSMENT OF HRDS

Human rights defenders and journalists are regularly subjected to arbitrary arrests and prosecution. On 18th February 2021, a Criminal Court [sentenced](#) Baradine Berdei Targuio, the president of human rights organisation *Organisation Tchadienne des Droits Humains* (Chadian Organisation of Human Rights) to three years in prison for 'violation of the constitutional order'. The HRD was arrested in January 2020 in relation to a Facebook post commenting on the health of the president. He was [held](#) in 'secret' detention for 211 days before his first appearance before a court. He was released on 10th June 2020. Mahamat Nour Ahmed Ibedou, the secretary general of another human rights organisation, *Convention tchadienne de défense des droits humains* (CTDDH), has for years been subjected to arbitrary arrests and judicial harassment. He was recently arrested and [sentenced](#) to three months in jail, suspended, for having participated in pre-electoral protests. He [spent](#) over a month in prison from December 2019 to January 2020 on fabricated charges of 'complicity of murder'.

## ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The CIVICUS Monitor is a research tool that provides quantitative and qualitative data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries. The data is generated through a collaboration with more than 20 civil society research partners, and input from a number of independent human rights evaluations.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED

REPRESSED

OBSTRUCTED

NARROWED

OPEN

The CIVICUS Monitor rates civic space – the space for civil society – in Chad as **"Repressed"**.



Spokesperson for the social movement *Mouvement Citoyen Le Temps*, Alain Kemba Didah, and two of his colleagues were [detained](#) on 27th November 2020 at the premises of radio station *Liberté FM* prior to giving an interview at the station. Kemba Didah and his colleagues were arrested in relation to the organisation of a Citizen Forum, meant to be a citizen alternative to the authorities' Inclusive National Forum and subsequently banned by authorities. The HRD was charged with 'act of rebellion and disturbance of public order' and acquitted in December 2020.

## **ATTACKS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: INTERNET RESTRICTIONS, SUSPENSION OF MEDIA OUTLETS, ARREST OF JOURNALISTS**

Authorities in Chad regularly impose internet restrictions. Access to internet and social media has been [disrupted](#) for over 900 days between the last presidential elections in 2016 and 2021. In July 2020, access to social media was disrupted as a 'temporary measure' to 'prevent the spread of messages of incitement to hatred and division' after a video showing a lethal altercation between a military officer and mechanics went viral. Between March 2018 and July 2019, access to social media and messaging applications was [restricted](#), with authorities citing security reasons to justify the restrictions.

Chad's national media regulator, the *Haute Autorité des Médias et de l'Audiovisuel* (HAMA) regularly suspends media outlets and sanctions journalists. On 7th September 2020, HAMA [suspended](#) twelve newspapers for three months on grounds of 'non-compliance' with the 2018 Press Law, specifically the provision that publishers and managing editors of publications are required to have academic qualifications in journalism. A month later, HAMA sent letters to three other newspapers – *N'Djamena Hebdo*, *La Voix* and *L'Éclairage* - threatening them with suspension if they did not comply with the same provision.

Several journalists have been arrested and prosecuted, in particular on criminal defamation charges following complaints by government officials or relatives of President Déby. Editor for the quarterly *Salam Info*, Martin Inoua Doulguet, was [sentenced](#) in September 2019 to a prison term of three years in relation to a publication alleging the existence of a sexual assault complaint against a former Minister. Initially charged with defamation, the prosecutor later requalified the charges to 'association for the purpose of computer crime' and 'false accusations'. The sentence was finally overturned on appeal in May 2020.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **TO THE TRANSITIONAL AUTHORITIES: [IVS1]**

- Amend restrictive provisions of the 2018 Press Law and guarantee the respect for freedom of expression at all times in line with Chad's domestic and international human rights obligations.

Ensure that entities like the *Haute Autorité des Médias et de l'Audiovisuel* (HAMA) promote rather than inhibit freedom of expression and media freedoms by ensuring that they operate freely from government interference.



- Guarantee that the rule of law is universally applied and hold accountable members of the security forces and representatives of government who target journalists and human rights defenders and address the high levels of impunity they enjoy.
- Drop charges against human rights defenders, political opponents, journalists and media organisations and take legal measures to ensure their protection.
- Allow access to the internet and social media at all times in line with Chad's international human rights obligations to respect the right to free expression.
- Guarantee that under all circumstances human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.
- Urgently organise an inclusive national dialogue that brings together representatives of the security forces, media, civil society, transitional authorities and members of the diplomatic community to discuss human rights concerns and agree on a framework to hold democratic elections and transfer power to a civilian government.

#### **TO THE AFRICAN UNION:**

- Ensure that Chad is held responsible for its unlawful treatment of human rights defenders, journalists and peaceful protesters and ensure that it complies with its regional human rights obligations, including those enshrined in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.
- Exert pressure on the transitional government and urge the government to institute a time-bound civilian-led transition that will lead to democratic elections.

#### **TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

- Urge Chad to abide by its international human rights obligations and to fulfil its voluntary commitments and pledges, including by scheduling visits of Special Procedures and refraining from threats and attacks against them.
- Ensure that the Transitional Government restores the Constitution and all republican institutions which were suspended following the death of President Déby's father.