

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION SITUATIONAL REPORT



KEY FACTS

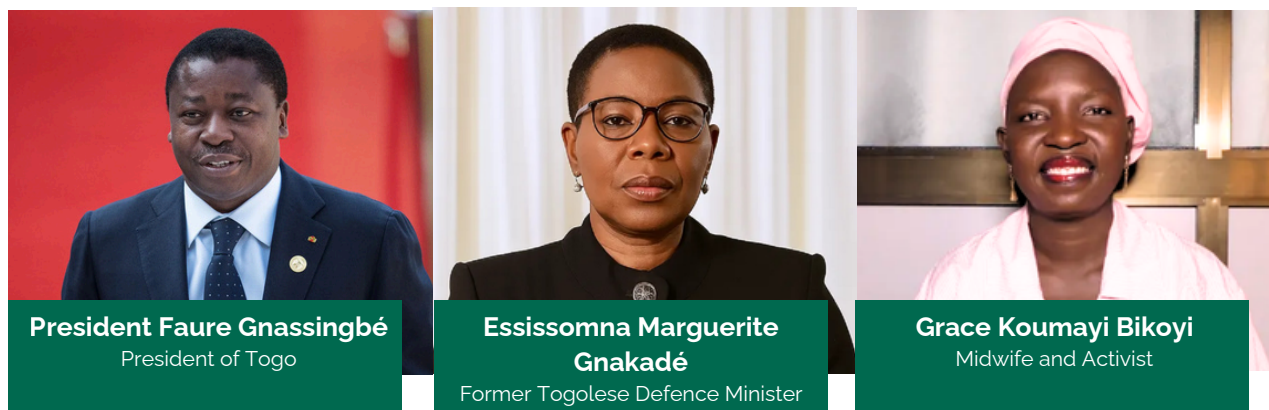
- 2 incidents restricting expression recorded
- Oct 3: New social media crackdown announced
- Criminal penalties introduced for online activity
- Activist arrested same day as policy announcement
- 3 days detention before formal charges
- Remanded in custody on security-related charges
- Vague laws risk abuse against dissent
- Self-censorship rising
- Civic space shrinking
- Online space under threat

BACKGROUND

Togo's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, assembly and association. The country is also State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), both of which have clear guarantees for expression and assembly. However, for many years, there have been documented gaps between these constitutional guarantees and international obligations, and the practical respect and protection of these fundamental freedoms.

The country's political environment, shaped by decades of centralised power and recurring episodes of social unrest, has left little room for open public debate or meaningful participation in governance. Thus, while official laws promise protections for free speech and media freedom, daily realities for journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens often tell a different story. In recent times, growing frustrations over governance, economic hardship, and restrictions on civic rights has led to demonstrations, including the June 2025 protests that resulted in the arrest of protestors and the death of seven people. Both traditional media and online platforms remain under close scrutiny, and critical voices risk intimidation or judicial pressure. These realities continue to narrow civic spaces for expression, including expression through protests.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN OCTOBER 2025



In the month of October 2025, for example, two issues were documented, each with a potential to further restrict expression. On October 3, the Public Prosecutor of Togo, Talaka Mawama, announced through a press conference new measures aimed at regulating the use of social media in Togo. The Public Prosecutor announced criminal prosecution for the 'misuse' of social media, warning that publishing, sharing, or validating content considered illegal online could lead to prosecution. According to him, the measures are aimed at countering defamation, hate speech, privacy violations, and to safeguard minors. Public opinion largely views this move as a repressive response to the June protests, especially since the authorities have blamed cyber-activists for the outcome of the June protests. The new measures are problematic for expression as they are largely vague and could be weaponised to victimise dissent and expression generally.

On the same day the Public Prosecutor announced the social media regulations (October 3, 2025), a Togolese activist, Grace Koumayi Bikoyi was arrested at her home by unidentified plainclothes agents. The arrest was made shortly after attending a meeting at the Collective of Associations Against Impunity in Togo (CACIT). She was subsequently detained at the Central Service for Criminal Research and Investigations (SCRIC) unit of the National Police Force for three days. On October 6, 2025, she was charged with "incitement to revolt" and "attempting to undermine state security" and remanded in custody. A month before her arrest she was seen at the Vogan Civil Prison to pay a visit to Honoré Sitsokpé, poet and cyber activist arrested and detained since January 2025. Bikoyi is known for her outspoken criticism of the authorities and active social media advocacy highlighting poor living conditions, bad governance, and restricted freedoms.



ONGOING AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

These two incidents recorded in Togo in October 2025 further illustrates the restricted civic space in the country. The announced criminal prosecution to purportedly regulate social media could be described as a way of proscribing what can be shared online or otherwise, and this has the propensity to force a number of people into self-censorship. The arrest of activist Bikoyi on the same day the social media regulation announcement was made, her continual detention and the charges leveled against her, seem to reinforce the threat of prosecution for dissenting views considered illegal content online. Both incidents have the tendency to chill expression across the country. It is unfortunate that for a country where expression (including protests) offline is largely restricted, the main alternative, social media, which has become the primary space for expression and denunciation, is also being restricted.

MFWA'S POSITION AND CALL TO ACTION

For a country with constitutional guarantees for expression and is State Party to international treaties that safeguard expression, the developments observed in October 2025 and previous months need attention. Togolese authorities must, therefore, ensure that the gap between their national and international obligations on freedom of expression and the practical implementation are addressed. The country must, thus, respect and protect the right to expression both offline and online. In particular, the Public Prosecutor, Talaka Mawama, must clearly and narrowly define online offenses in line with international standards on freedom of expression to avoid abuses while ensuring that the object of the intervention is achieved. Until the clear definitions are provided for by the Public Prosecutor, the country must refrain from using the new rules to govern the social media space, critical voices, journalists, and civil society actors. Meanwhile, the voices of conscience in detention and in prison, such as Grace Koumayi Bikoyi, Honore Sitsokpe and Essissomna Marguerite Gnakadé, should be released as a demonstration of the government's commitment to its own constitution and international human rights obligations.

This report is compiled by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) with funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana. The report was compiled using data from the daily monitoring and documentation of developments in the freedom of expression environment (offline and online) in Togo in the month of October 2025. The monitoring and reporting forms part of a 12-month (September 2025 to August 2026) project in Togo that is aimed at improving the press freedom environment in the country. As part of the project, the MFWA monitors and reports on the press freedom, freedom of expression (including expression through protests), and safety of journalists' conditions in the country.