

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION SITUATIONAL REPORT



KEY FACTS

- 1,511 detainees pardoned, including nine activists and dissenting voices.
- Clemency by Faure Gnassingbé formalised on Dec 30, 2025.
- Arrested without clear charges, several activists set for release.
- Tournons la Page members among beneficiaries.
- Notable detainees, including Honoré Sitsofé and Grace Koumayi Bikoyi, to regain freedom.
- Arrests often carried out by plainclothed operatives.
- Civic space remains restricted despite the clemency.

BACKGROUND

Togo's socio-political landscape since independence in 1960 has generally been marked by authoritarianism – from the decades of military rule under President Gnassingbé Eyadéma. The traits of autocracy have persisted in the country even after years of transition into democratic dispensation. While the Togolese Constitution guarantees press freedom, free speech and the right to assembly, these rights are frequently subverted in practice. Expression is often attacked through harassment and intimidation of journalists, protestors and political opponents; suspension and shutdown of media outlets and occasional internet disruptions to limit the flow of information. Protests have been banned in the country since 2017. Protests held in June 2025 resulted in seven deaths, over 100 arrests and dozens of injured protestors. The civic space in the country continues to shrink as the media and civil society organizations continue to operate in a restricted environment and opposition voices persistently face intimidation

MEDIA FOUNDATION FOR WEST AFRICA'S INTERVENTION IN TOGO

In line with its mandate to create an enabling environment for expression and participation in governance processes across West Africa, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has been monitoring and reporting the freedom of expression (FOE) conditions in the 16 countries in the region. In September 2025, with funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana, the MFWA began to dive deeper into the freedom of expression (including expression through protests) and press freedom situation in Togo. The 12-month intervention seeks to contribute to improving the FOE environment for women (offline and online), civic actors and the media in particular to serve as agents for improving the rule of law in Togo. As part of the project, the MFWA monitors and produces monthly reports on the press freedom, freedom of expression (including expression through protests), and safety of journalists' conditions in the country. The monthly reports serve as awareness creation and advocacy materials for drawing attention to the situation in the country, demanding redress, and advocating for laws and policies reforms.

This report captures the major freedom of expression and press freedom developments observed in Togo in the month of December 2025.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION DEVELOPMENT DECEMBER 2025



Faure Gnassingbe
President of the Council of
Ministers



Abel Yawo Atitso
Secrétaire Général du Syndicat
Estudiantin (SEET)



Armand Agblézé
Activist, Tournons la Page

December 2025 marked a significant period in the freedom of expression landscape in Togo. At least nine activists and dissidents were scheduled to regain their freedom from detention/prison following periods of detention. On December 3, 2025, President of the Council of Ministers, Faure Gnassingbe, announced that some 1,511 detainees and prisoners would benefit from a presidential clemency measure. The announcement was made during his State of the Nation address and was ratified by a decree adopted by the Council of Ministers on December 30, 2025. Nine of the 1511 detainees and prisoners were known critical voices and civic actors who had been detained or imprisoned for their dissent.

Abel Yawo Atitso, secrétaire général du syndicat étudiantin (SEET), Abdoul Zoulkaneini Lamboni, a SEET member, and another student, Julien Komandéga Kataka were among the 1511 who are to regained freedom from detention. They were reported to have been arrested on September 3, 2025 by plainclothed police officers in a vehicle. No official information was provided by authorities regarding the reason(s) for their arrests.

Armand Agblézé and Oséi Agbagno, activists from the Togolese citizens' movement, Tournons la Page, who were arrested on August 22, 2025 and subsequently charged with "aggravated public order disturbance," and Chimene Akou Apevon, a paralegal of Tournons la Page, who was also arrested on August 28, are all slated to benefit from the presidential clemency. Apevon was was accused also accused of aggravated disturbance of public order, incitement to violence, undermining state security, and attempting to destabilise state institutions.

The other activists and dissidents who would be beneficiaries of the presidential pardon are Togolese-Irish citizen (a businessman and human rights defender), Abdoul Aziz Goma; poet Honoré Sitsofé, also known as Affectio; and Togolese midwife and activist, Grace Koumayi Bikoyi. Goma was arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in Prison in February 3, 2025 for "undermining national security[DM1]." Sitsofé was picked up by plain-clothed officers in Lomé after he published a poem on Facebook. In the case of Bikoyi, she was arrested at her home by unidentified, plainclothed agents on October 3, 2025. After being held in custody for three days, she was remanded into custody by an examining magistrate on October 6 for "incitement to revolt" and "attempting to undermine state security."

The presidential clemency for the 1511 that was ratified by a decree adopted by the Council of Ministers on December 30, 2025 comes as a sigh of relief for the soon to be freed detainees/prisoners and freedom of expression and human rights advocates.

[DM1]Since the prison sentence was in February 2025, I think we should have an alert that we can hyperlink this to.

MFWA'S POSITION AND CALL TO ACTION

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) welcomes the presidential clemency for the 1511 detainees and prisoners, including the nine voices of conscience. We call on the appropriate agencies to ensure that the decree, as adopted by the Council of Ministers on December 30, 2025, is carried out to the letter to ensure that the beneficiaries are indeed freed. To make the presidential pardon even more enduring and impactful, we call on the Togolese authorities to respect the rule of law, due process, and ensure a more enabling civic space (offline and online) for citizens' participation in governance for the consolidation of democracy in the country.