

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION SITUATIONAL REPORT



### KEY FACTS

- 25 detainees launch hunger strike in Lomé Civil Prison.
- Activist Grace Koumayi Bikoyi detained after October arrest.
- Hunger strike challenges arbitrary detention, poor conditions.
- Lomé prison flagged for closure over inhumane conditions.
- Poet Honoré Sitsopé Sokpor still detained since January.
- Calls grow for release of detained civic voices.
- Civic space remains under pressure despite legal guarantees.

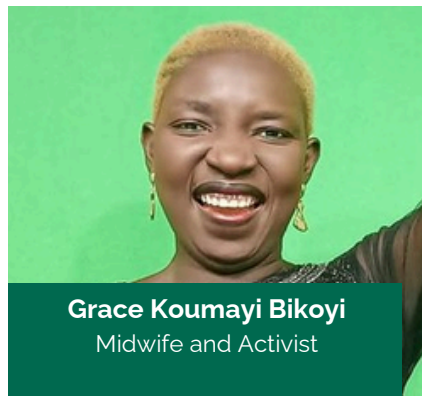
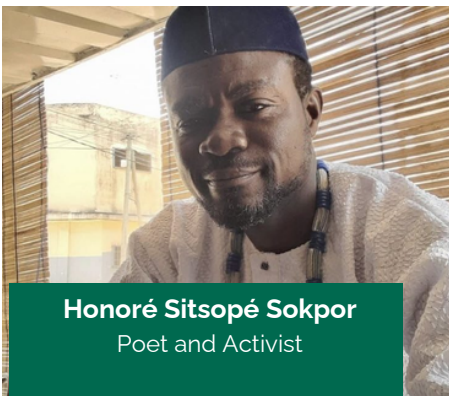
### BACKGROUND

Togo, a West African country with a population of about 9 million, gained independence 65 years ago. The country has made modest economic progress in recent years, yet it continues to grapple with significant challenges related to governance, civil liberties, and inclusive development. While the Togolese Constitution guarantees press freedom, free speech and expression through protests are frequently undermined in practice. Freedom of expression is persistently under attack in the country through harassment and intimidation of journalists, suspension and shutdown of media outlets and occasional network disruptions to limit the flow of information. Protests have been banned in the country since 2017. Recent protests held in June 2025 to demand restoration of constitutional rule, justice for the abused and resignation of the sitting President 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 organisations continue to operate in a restricted environment and opposition voices persistently face intimidation.

## ABOUT THE MFWA'S WORK IN TOGO

With funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is implementing a 12-month (September 2025 to August 2026) project in Togo with the aim of improving the press freedom environment in the country. This is to ensure that the media are able to play their watchdog role and serve as agents for improving the rule of law in Togo. 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. To provide an overview of the situation in the country month on month, the organisation, produces monthly reports about the freedom of expression situation in Togo on a monthly basis over the project period. This report highlights the freedom of expression and press freedom issues observed in Togo over the month of November 2025.

## KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN NOVEMBER 2025



The month of November was marked by a notable demand for justice; not by human rights defenders or other civic actors, but detainees. On November 8, 2025, 25 critical voices detained at the Lomé Civil Prison started a peaceful resistance movement with a collective hunger strike. The action was aimed at protesting against their arbitrary detention and to demand justice. Among the detainees embarking on the hunger strike was Grace Koumayi Bikoyi, a midwife and outspoken activist on social media, who was arrested at her home a month earlier (October 3, 2025) by unidentified plainclothes agents.

The hunger strike was driven by concerns over the arbitrary nature of their arrests, harsh detention conditions, and the alarming health situations of some of the detainees. The prison itself has long faced criticism. In 2019, the United Nations Committee Against Torture recommended its closure due to inhumane conditions. Despite this, detainees continue to be held in that penitentiary facility.

Following the collective action taken by the detainees and the advocacy efforts by the MFWA and other human rights defenders for the release of detained/imprisoned dissidents, it is expected that the Togolese authorities will act to release these voices of conscience, as well as others in other prisons, such as poet and activist Honoré Sitsopé Sokpor who has been in pre-trial detentions at the Vogan Civil Prison since January 10, 2025.

## MFWA'S CALL TO THE TOGOLESE AUTHORITIES

Freedom of expression remains one of the fundamental pillars of democracy. Moreover, it is a right that is guaranteed by Togo's Constitution. Arresting and detaining activist, journalists and dissenting voices is, therefore, a violation. And keeping such people in pre-trial detention for months without trial effectively punishes them before their cases are even adjudicated. Such practices become instruments of repression, with serious physical and psychological consequences, which ultimately discourage the individuals concerned, and many others, from expressing themselves on matters of public interest or making their voices heard through legitimate civic means. The MFWA, therefore, calls on the Togolese authorities to

- Release unconditionally all the 25 civic actors, as well as all suspects who have been in pre-trial detention for more than three months.
- Protect and respect the right to expression online and offline (including press freedom and expression through protests) as guaranteed by Togo's 1992 Constitution (as revised in 2007) and in accordance with the country's international human rights obligations.
- Implement the recommendations of the United Nations Committee Against Torture to close down the Lomé Civil Prison.