Media Foundation for West Africa

TOGO WATCH

Freedom of Expression Situational Report

MARCH 2026



KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN MARCH 2026



Freedom of expression in Togo witnessed a significant update in March 2026 in the case of comedian Gros Akpaou, whose place of detention had remained unknown since his arrest on December 30, 2025. Togolese activist Grace Koumayi disclosed this month that Akpaou was being held at Kara Civil Prison.

Police officers arrested Akpaou at his home on the night of 30 December 2025, the same day the Council of Ministers announced a presidential pardon benefiting 1,511 people. Akpaou is reportedly arrested for criticising the government. Known widely as Tayo, Akpaou is one of Togo's most influential online comedians, with more than 900,000 followers on TikTok, Akpaou's content addresses social issues, denouncing perceived injustices and governance challenges.

For nearly three months after his arrest, authorities gave no official information about the circumstances of his arrest, the reasons for his detention, or his whereabouts. This prolonged silence raised significant concerns about violations of Akpaou's right to be informed promptly of the charges against him and his right to judicial review of his detention, as well as fears of a possible enforced disappearance.

Although Koumayi's disclosure of Akpaou's detention eases the immediate fear that Akpaou had been forcibly disappeared, it does not resolve the underlying due process concerns of his detention for nearly three months without formal notification of charges or access to judicial review. According to information Koumayi received from the head of Kara Civil Prison, Tayo faces charges of disturbing public order and criminal conspiracy and is in pretrial detention there.



The circumstances of his arrest and the prolonged incommunicado detention reflect, at least in part, the state of the civic landscape and the challenges to freedom of expression in Togo. The absence of timely official communication about his arrest, coupled with his detention, risks creating a climate of uncertainty and self-censorship among citizens.

MFWA'S POSITION AND CALL TO ACTION

The MFWA welcomes the fact that Tayo's whereabouts has been established. However, we condemn the silence from authorities concerning his pick up and pretrial detention. The lack of clear information about his arrest, detention, and placement in pretrial detention raises serious concerns about transparency, due process, and the protection of his fundamental rights. Cases like Tayo's can create fear and encourage self-censorship across the country. This negatively impacts participation in public discourses and governance. Although MFWA's daily monitoring in March 2026 did not capture any new incident of freedom of expression violation in Togo, the organisation regards the possible ramifications of the Tayo case equally concerning for freedom of expression in the country.

The MFWA, therefore, calls on Togolese authorities to help build trust in state institutions by safeguarding the right to expression (offline and online) which is guaranteed by Togo's national Constitution; and respect for due process.

MFWA'S INTERVENTION IN TOGO

The above situational report is part of an intervention by the MFWA to contribute to creating an enabling environment for expression and participation in governance processes in Togo, and across West Africa at large. The monitoring and reporting of freedom of expression situation in Togo falls under an MFWA project titled, **Promoting Press Freedom and Women's Digital Rights in Togo.** The 12-month project is made possible with funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana.

The project seeks to contribute to improving the freedom of expression (offline and online) environment in the country, strengthening the capacity of the media and improving the safety of journalists' conditions in the country to ensure that the media are able to play their watchdog role and serve as agents for improving the rule of law in Togo. The project is also targeted at empowering female journalists, activists and civil society actors on how to optimise online platforms for participation in public discourses and governance processes while staying safe.

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 policy and regulatory reforms.

Empowering Media and Voices for Public Good

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