

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION SITUATIONAL REPORT



KEY FACTS

- 7 killed, 100+ arrested in June protests.
- Ex-Minister Essissomna Gnacadé and artist Aamron arrested in September.
- Poet Honoré Sokpor still detained since January.
- RFI & France 24 remain suspended.
- Internet restrictions lifted after three months.
- Civic space shrinking amid bans on protests since 2017.

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. Since its independence in 1960, Togo's political landscape has been marked by limited democratic space, civil unrests and general authoritarianism from the decades of military rule under President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, to the fourth-term rule of the current President, Faure Gnassingbé.

While the Togolese Constitution guarantees press freedom, free speech and the right to assembly, these rights 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 project in the country with the aim of improving the press freedom environment 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. 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, will produce monthly reports about the situation in Togo over the project period (September 2025 to August 2026). This report highlights the major freedom of expression and press freedom issues observed in Togo over the month of September 2025.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN SEPTEMBER 2025



President Faure Gnassingbé –
President of Togo



Essissomna Marguerite Gnacadé
– Former Togolese Defence
Minister



Aamron (Tchala Essowè
Narcisse) – Togolese rapper

In September 2025 two critical voices were arrested in Togo – former Defence Minister, Essissomna Marguerite Gnacadé and activist artist Aamron, (Tchala Essowè Narcisse). On September 17, 2025, about 30 armed officers raided the house of former Togolese Defence Minister, Essissomna Marguerite Gnacadé, at dawn and arrested her. They seized her electronic devices before taking her into custody. In the months preceding her arrest, the former Minister had criticised President Faure Gnassingbé and the constitutional reforms in the country. Gnacadé, who served as Minister of the Armed Forces from 2020 to 2022, had publicly condemned the violent crackdown on the June protests that killed seven people and questioned the President's leadership.

Two days after her arrest, popular Togolese artist, Aamron was also arrested on September 19, 2025. He was charged with inciting revolt, spreading false information, and insulting state authorities. He was released the day after (September 20, 2025) under judicial supervision. His passport has since been confiscated. Aamron had previously been arrested and detained in May 2025 for social media posts and videos criticizing President Faure Gnassingbé and urging youth action, including a "satirical mobilisation" on the president's birthday.



ONGOING AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

These arrests added up to the unresolved freedom of expression issues in the country, including the suspension of the broadcasts of French public outlets RFI and France 24 in June 2025 ; the death of five protestors and abuses against scores of protestors also in June 2025, and the continued detention of Togolese cyber activist and poet, Honoré Sitsopé Sokpor, who was arrested in January 2025 for posting a poem urging citizens to stand against oppression. While these unresolved issues continued to create a relatively unsafe space for critical voices and independent journalistic reporting in the country, the widespread internet restrictions that severely limited citizens' access to information on platforms such as Facebook, Signal, Telegram, YouTube, and DuckDuckGo since June 2025, was reversed in the month under review.

MFWA'S POSITION AND CALL TO ACTION

Freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly are and remain fundamental pillars of any progressive society. They guarantee every citizen's right to be informed, to express themselves freely, and to participate actively in public discourse and governance processes. It is in the interest of these that the Togolese Constitution guarantees the right to expression, press freedom and freedom of assembly. The MFWA, therefore, calls on the Togolese government to create an enabling environment for the people of Togo to share and participate in their own governance through a free, open and safe civic space. In particular, we call on the government of Togo to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release former Minister Essissomna Marguerite Gnacadé, Aamron (Tchala Essowè Narcisse), and activist and poet, Honoré Sitsopé Sokpor.
- Lift the suspension placed on RFI and France 24 media outlets, and facilitate all processes that will ensure that the two media outlets resume broadcast.
- Investigate into, and ensure that justice is served to the five deaths and the over 100 people who were assaulted during the June 2025 protests.
- Strengthen protection mechanisms for journalists, bloggers, artists, and activists.

The implementation of these recommendations will help the country to create a healthy market place of ideas, trust in government and state institutions, and engender a positive image and reputation for the country and its government.