

## Joint Statement

African citizen movements, activists, campaigners, civil society actors strongly condemn the ongoing repression of journalists and media actors, as well as the drastic closing of civic space in Burkina Faso!

In a video shared on social networks on 5 April 2025, three Burkinabe journalists, Guézouma Sanogo, Boukari Ouoba and Luc Pagbelguem were seen in military uniform. This 'requisition', according to supporters of the ruling military in Ouagadougou, will enable them to 'cover the reality' of the fight against terrorism. The Military Junta is known for drafting critics and dissenting voices to the battlefield against the jihadist insurgent groups active across the Sahel region

Guézouma Sanogo and Boukari Ouoba, respectively president and vice-president of the Association des Journalistes du Burkina (AJB), were abducted on 24 March 2025 from the premises of the Centre national de presse Norbert Zongo (CNP-NZ). They were taken to an unknown destination by individuals claiming to be intelligence agents. The CNP-NZ is the symbol of freedom of expression and the press in Burkina Faso. It bears the name of its most famous journalist, Norbert Zongo, who was murdered on 13 December 1998.

The kidnapping came three days after they publicly denounced the deterioration of press freedom and the increasing interference of the authorities in the media. These views were expressed at the AJB's General Assembly on 21 March 2025, at which Guézouma Sanogo was re-elected to head the association for a five-year term.

On the same day, Luc Pagbelguem, a journalist with the private television station BF1, was arrested by agents of the National Security Council on the pretext of a simple interrogation concerning his report on the AJB congress held on 21 March.

The day after their arrest, the government decided to dissolve the AJB, justifying the measure on the grounds of alleged non-compliance with a 2015 law governing associations. 'According to the law (...), there is no association called the Association of Journalists of Burkina', declared the Minister of Territorial Administration, Emile Zerbo, in a press release.

On March 30, the Executive Secretary of Balai Citoyen, Ousmane Lankoande, was abducted by the military junta upon his return from an event in Cotonou, Benin. Just days prior, another Balai Citoyen activist, Amadou Sawadogo, was also kidnapped in Ouagadougou. Both individuals remain missing, and their whereabouts are still unknown. These incidents reflect the increasingly repressive environment in Burkina Faso, where civil society actors are targeted and silenced under the current regime.

Several journalists and media figures were kidnapped and reported missing in 2024, including Atiana Serges Oulon, Bienvenu Apiou, James Dembélé, Mamadou Ali Compaoré, Kalifara Séré and Adama Bayala. All were known for their criticism of the ruling junta. Until then, Burkina Faso enjoyed a dynamic, professional and pluralist media landscape. The country had more than 80 newspapers (Sidwaya, L'Événement, Le Pays), 185 radio stations (Omega FM), around 30 television channels (Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina, BF1) and more than a hundred news websites (faso.net, Faso 7, Burkina 24).

Since the junta led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré came to power on 30 September 2022, censorship has intensified. The authorities began by banning access to several international media such as Deutsche Welle, Le Monde.fr, The Guardian, BBC, Voice of America, RFI, France 24 and Jeune Afrique, accusing them of 'harming the national effort against armed jihadist groups'. As a result, Burkina Faso saw its ranking in the World Press Freedom Index drop from 58<sup>e</sup> place in 2023 to 86<sup>e</sup> in 2024.

Repression is not limited to journalists. Political activists, human rights defenders and artists are either kidnapped or forced into exile. On 18 March, journalist Idrissa Barry, a member of the political movement Servir et non se servir (Sens), was abducted in broad daylight after his organisation denounced massacres of civilians attributed to the army.

On 22 March, four other members of the movement suffered the same fate. In addition, the movement's national coordinator, a lawyer and co-founder of the Balai Citoyen collective, has been imprisoned since July 2024 on trumped-up charges of 'conspiracy and criminal association'.

On 25 May 2024, the junta extended the transition by five years at a national conference held behind closed doors. Traditional political parties have been excluded from the decision-making process, and the new charter imposes a criterion of 'patriotism' for membership of the transitional government and assembly, making opposition virtually impossible.

In fact, Burkina Faso is no longer in transition, since Captain Ibrahim Traoré has been appointed President of Burkina Faso, a title conferred only on an elected president. Furthermore, on 1 April 2025, in a speech broadcast on national television, the leader of the putschists officially decreed the end of democracy in Burkina Faso, proclaiming a progressive popular revolution.

According to the Global Terrorism Index 2025, Burkina Faso has been ranked as the country most affected by terrorism for the second year running. The central Sahel region, where Burkina Faso is located, has become the epicentre of terrorism, accounting for more than half of all terrorism-related deaths worldwide.

Burkina Faso is the country most affected by terrorism in the Sahel, according to the Global Terrorism Index. However, this situation must not be used as a pretext for the repression of fundamental freedoms.

We recall that kidnappings, carried out outside any legal judicial framework, violate several articles of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

We, citizens' movements and civil society organisations committed to the defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms, demand :

- The immediate release of all abducted journalists and pro-democracy activists;

- An end to the repression of dissent voices and pro-democracy activists;
- An end to the restriction of civic space and the opening up of political space for citizens' organisations, political parties and movements to flourish;
- Respect for and protection of the fundamental rights of Burkina Faso's citizens, in accordance with Article 1 of the Transition Charter adopted on 25 March 2024.

In the face of the systematic repression of dissent voices in Burkina Faso, we urge the ECOWAS/AES mediators, and the President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, to intervene and make the release of these journalists and human rights activists an absolute priority.

Finally, we reaffirm our unwavering solidarity and support for the pro-democracy activists in Burkina Faso, who are working courageously to defend fundamental rights and civil liberties in the face of the increasing repression.

## Signatories

- AfricTivistes
- AfrikaJom Center
- West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS)
- Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana)
- Article 19 West Africa
- Africans Rising
- African Network of Constitutional Lawyers (ANCL)
- Alioune Tine, Human rights activist and United Nations (UN) expert
- Ibrahima Kane, lawyer and co-founder of the Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l'homme (Raddho)
- Deji Adejanyu, Nigerian activist and lawyer
- Salieu Taal, former President of the Bar Association of the Gambia
- Paul Amegakpo, Director of the Tamberma Institute for Governance
- Austin Aigbe, Civil Society Activist, Nigeria
- Fovi Katakou, Tournons La Page Togo
- Nerima Wako Ojiwa, Executive Director at Siasa Place
- Elorm Ababio, activist and social media influencer, Democracy Hub

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