



March 12, 2019

Commissioner Lawrence Murugu Mute

Office of the African Union Special Rapporteur
Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Dear Commissioner Mute,

Petition:

We, the undersigned organisations that work to promote freedom of expression offline and online across the globe, write to express deep concern about the shutdown of social media platforms by the government of Chad over the past eleven months, and urge you to take action to help restore access.

Since March 28, 2018, mobile operators in Chad have denied Internet users in the country access to social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp on the orders of government.

The government gave no explanation for the social media blackout. However, the action is widely believed to be aimed at quelling public protests across the country by undermining citizens' capacity to mobilise through the power of the Internet and social media platforms.

Since the blackout, most citizens who rely on social media platforms to carry out their daily activities are unable to access these platforms anymore. A few of the people of Chad have resorted to the use of Virtual Private Network (VPNs) in order to access social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter etc.

This is the second time the government of Chad has shut down the access to Internet within the last one year. Government ordered a complete Internet blackout in January 2018, again, without any explanation.

Mr Commissioner, several calls by local, regional and international rights groups calling upon the government of Chad to restore these platforms have been ignored.

The disruption of the networks in Chad is a flagrant violation of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Resolution, ACHPR/Res. 362 (LIX) 2016 which recognises the "importance of the internet in advancing human and people's rights in Africa, particularly the right to freedom of information and expression;"

The ACHPR/Res. 362 (LIX) 2016 also condemns the "emerging practice of State Parties interrupting or limiting access to telecommunication services such as the internet, social media and messaging services;"

Additionally, the situation in Chad is also at variance with the above-mentioned resolution which “calls on State Parties to respect and take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect citizens’ right of information and expression through access to internet services;”

Finally, we believe that the use of Internet blackout or network disruptions to curtail freedom of expression rights of the Chadian people contravenes Article 27 of the country’s national constitution.

We, the undersigned organisations reaffirm that the social media blackout in Chad violates the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and access to information of citizens as enshrined in regional and international frameworks including, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR).

Moreover, network disruptions have proven to limit the ability of journalists to report safely and for citizens to access information or communicate with their families, friends and colleagues online. The social media blackout is also incongruent with the economic, social and personal wellbeing and aspirations of the citizenry. Businesses, schools and other institutions which rely on the Internet for their operations are forced to resort to the use of VPNs, which comes at an extra cost.

We urge you, as the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, to use the powers of your office to publicly denounce the social media blackout in Chad and put pressure on President Idriss Deby of Chad to respond to calls from rights groups and restore access to all social media platforms throughout the country.

We are confident that your office will take note of the infractions enumerated above and consider the above recommendations towards improving the freedom of expression and overall human rights environment, both online and offline in Chad.

Yours Sincerely,
Signed,

1. Access Now;
2. Adil Soz - International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech;
3. ADISI-Cameroun;
4. Advocacy Initiative for Development (AID);
5. Afghanistan Journalist Center (AFJC);
6. Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC);
7. AfroLeadership;
8. AFROTRIBUNE;
9. Alliance for Affordable Internet;
10. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB);
11. ARTICLE 19;
12. Association of Caribbean Media Workers;
13. Association Guinéenne Des Editeurs De La Presse Indépendante (AGEPI);
14. Association de Journalistes du Cabo Verde (AJOC);
15. Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS);
16. Association for Progressive Communications (APC);
17. Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE);

18. Bloggers of Zambia;
19. Bytes for All (B4A);
20. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR);
21. Cartoonists Rights Network International (CRNI);
22. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ);
23. Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR);
24. Center for Media Studies & Peacebuilding (CEMESP);
25. Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo;
26. Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA);
27. Collectif Sassoufit (Congo Brazzaville);
28. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ);
29. Democratic Credentials Network (DCN);
30. Electronic Frontier Foundation;
31. Freedom Forum;
32. Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI);
33. Gambia Press Union (GPU);
34. Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda (HRNJ-U);
35. Institute for Media and Society (IMS);
36. Independent Journalism Center (IJC);
37. Initiative for Freedom of Expression – Turkey;
38. International Press Center (IPC);
39. Internet Sans Frontières (ISF) ;
40. Internews
41. Journaliste en Danger (JED);
42. Kenya ICT Network (KICTANet);
43. Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance;
44. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA);
45. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Lesotho Chapter;
46. MISA Malawi Chapter;
47. MiSA Zambia Chapter;
48. MISA Zimbabwe Chapter;
49. Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG);
50. Media Rights Agenda (MRA);
51. Namibia Media Trust;
52. NetBlocks ;
53. Observatoire de la Déontologie et de l’Ethique dans les Medias (ODEM);
54. OpenNet Africa;
55. Open Net Korea;
56. Paradigm Initiative;
57. Pacific Islands News Association (PINA);
58. Pakistan Press Foundation;
59. Projet pour une Alternance Crédible au Tchad (PACT);
60. Reporters sans frontières (RSF);
61. Right2Know Campaign in South Africa;
62. RosKomSvoboda;
63. Rudi International;
64. SFLC.in;
65. Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA);
66. South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM);

67. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM);
68. OXCON Frontier Markets and Fragile States Consulting;
69. PEN America;
70. Sindicato De Journalistas e Tecnicos De Comunicacao Social Guinea Bissau (SINJOTECS);
71. Software Freedom Law Centre India;
72. Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA);
73. The Bachchao Project;
74. Unwanted Witness Uganda;
75. Vigilance for Democracy and the Civic State;
76. Yemeni Observatory for Rights and Sustainable Development (YORSD)
77. West African Journalists Association (WAJA);
78. West African Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN);
79. World Federation of Intercultural Journalists (WOFIJ);
80. World Wide Web Foundation;

**CC: David Kaye,
UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression,**

ABOUT AFEX

AFEX is a continental network of some of the most prominent freedom of expression and media rights organisations in Africa that are also members of the global network of free expression organisations, IFEX. The network is currently made up of 12 member organisations based in West, East, Central and Southern Africa. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) serves as the Secretariat of Visit here to read more: www.africafex.org