



27<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**STATEMENT ON THE RISING TREND OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN EAST AFRICA.**

The East African Civil Society Organizations' Forum (EACSOFF) acknowledges the significant strides made by East African Community Partner States in advancing regional integration and strengthening democratic governance. However, we must draw attention to deeply concerning trends and patterns that threaten and undermine our collective progress as a community. In recent months, we have witnessed an unprecedented surge in reported cases of citizen disappearances, abductions, extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, illegal detention, excessive use of force against peaceful protestors, intimidation of political opponents, mass executions and restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. The foregone incidents have been widely reported by media outlets, civil society organizations, human rights institutions, and human rights defenders across the region and we must admit they are concerning patterns of violation of fundamental human rights and human dignity in our society. Of particular concern is the impact of these practices and incidents to our integration efforts and their impact to the marginalized groups, including women human rights defenders, youth activists, indigenous peoples, and minority communities, who appear to face heightened vulnerability in the current environment.

These serious human rights violations violate **Article 6(d) and Article 7(2) of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community**, which require Partner States to uphold good governance, democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and universal human rights. They further undermine **Article 3(3)(b) of the Treaty**, which promotes peaceful dispute resolution and human rights as foundations of regional integration. These violations therefore demand our immediate and concerted attention as a community, as they threaten the very foundations of our regional cooperation and shared values.

In recognition of the significance of these developments and their implications for regional peace, democratic governance, and human dignity requires immediate action from all East African Community stakeholders. After considering these factors and our common commitment to upholding the EAC Treaty's principles, EACSOFF presents the following immediate implementation recommendations:

1. **We urge EAC Partner States** to act on human rights. Establish independent investigations for all enforced disappearances, strengthen witness protection programs, and publish inquiry progress transparently. Partner States must improve their security governance to prevent illegal arrest and imprisonment by ensuring all law enforcement acts follow their constitutions.
2. In line with Articles 27 and 23 of the Treaty, which establish the jurisdiction of **the East African Court of Justice (EACJ)** and mandate it to uphold the rule of law in interpreting and applying the Treaty, we call on the EACJ and other EAC organs to act decisively against these violations. Referring to Article 124(5)(c) and Article 71(1)(b), we urge the EACJ to strengthen regional human rights monitoring by creating an emergency response system for enforced disappearances. Additionally, under Article 124(5)(a) on exchanging criminal intelligence, we propose a standardized regional database of missing persons and a harmonized reporting mechanism, aligned with Article 124(1), which underscores peace and security as vital for the Community's development.
3. We call upon **the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** in the region to conduct independent and joint investigation programs over the above incidents of concern. This should be in line with the crucial role and mandate of the CSOs in each country and region to support national human rights institutions through technical expertise and capacity building.
4. We urge **the EAC Secretariat** to establish a Regional Task Force on Unlawful Arrests, Enforced Disappearances, and Human Rights Violations, in line with Article 2(3) of the Peace and Security Protocol and Article 4 on conflict prevention. The task force should include representatives from Partner States, EAC organs, civil society, and human rights institutions to devise strategies for prevention, investigation, and victim support. In accordance with Article 6(d) of the EAC Treaty and Article 124, the task force should provide accessible reports through relevant EAC organs.

EACSOFF commits to strengthening its monitoring and documentation efforts while providing support to affected families and organizations. We will establish a specific working group of CSOs and other actors addressing above listed issues of human rights concern with specific focus in responding to the burning issues enumerated in paragraph one above. This working group will facilitate rapid information sharing, coordinate response, provide required support, engage EAC member states, and take appropriate measures to demand accountability in all cases of human rights violations.

The future vitality of our regional integration depends significantly on our ability to address these human rights challenges effectively. Therefore, EACSOFF advocates and demands a renewed commitment to strengthening human rights protections across the East African Community. This commitment must be demonstrated through concrete actions and meaningful collaboration between Partner States, regional institutions, and civil society organizations. Given the complex nature of these challenges, a holistic approach is inevitable. Hence, EACSOFF remains dedicated to facilitating constructive dialogue between all stakeholders and supporting initiatives that advance human rights protection in our region. By working together, we can strengthen the implementation of human rights standards that align with our constitutional principles and international obligations.

Therefore, we call upon all stakeholders to join in this essential endeavor to build an East African Community that upholds every individual's dignity and fundamental rights. Our collective response to these challenges will determine not only the strength of our democratic institutions but also the prosperity and well-being of future generations in East Africa.



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January 27 - 2025