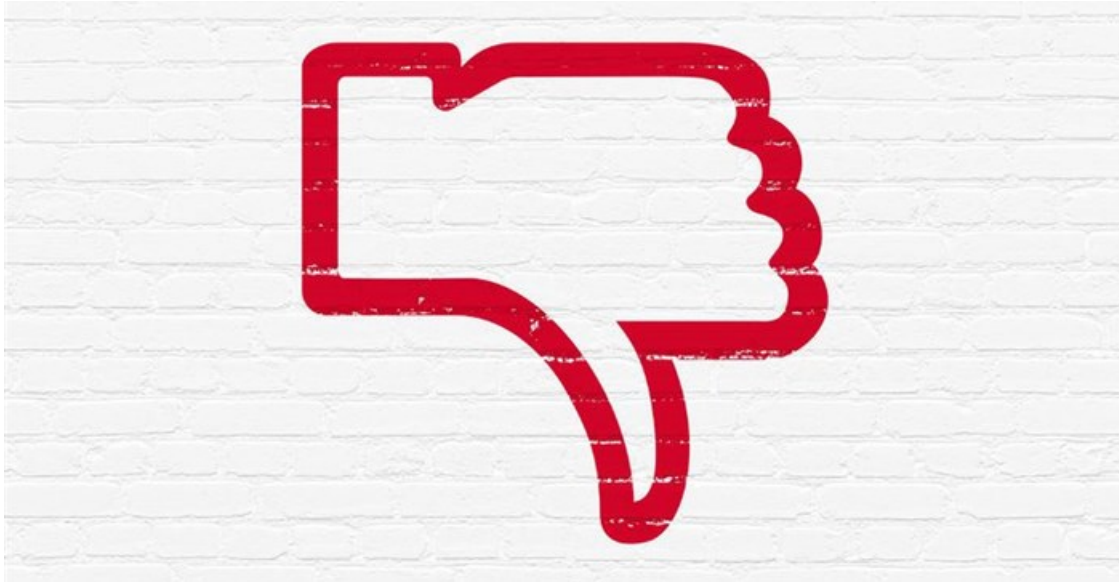


CPJ slams Tanzania govt for "draconian" social media laws

Authorities in Tanzania should immediately rescind regulations that force online forums, blogs, and streaming websites to register with the government - a process that requires them to pay large entry fees and comply with draconian regulations - and withdraw threats of legal action for noncompliance, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



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The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) issued a [directive](#) that went into effect yesterday ordering unregistered websites to comply with the country's [Electronic and Postal Communications \(Online Content\) Regulations](#) or cease publication. Those that fail to [register](#) by June 15 will face legal action, according to [media reports](#) that cited the directive and regulations.

[The regulations](#), which were originally issued in March 2018 by Information Minister Harisson Mwakyembe, set high registration fees that require bloggers and forum hosts to pay an initial fee of \$484 and an annual fee of \$440.

The rules also allow the government to strip online users of anonymity, requiring websites to "have in place mechanisms to identify" those who interact on the forums, and require that cyber cafes keep user logs for up to 12 months. Additionally, the regulations allow the government to force websites to take down "prohibited" content, [broadly defined](#) to include material that "causes annoyance".

According to [a Monday report](#) by Reuters, several websites, including online discussion platform [Jamii Forums](#), have chosen to shut down temporarily in response to the directive.

Failure to comply with these regulations can carry a prison term of up to 12 months and fines of up to five million Tanzanian shillings (US\$2,200).

"President John Magufuli's policies are aggressively eroding the diversity and robustness of online media in Tanzania and by extension East Africa. This policy is counter-intuitive to Tanzania's democratic goals," said CPJ's Africa program coordinator, Angela Quintal, from New York. "We urge authorities to scrap these problematic regulations and allow the free press to thrive online."

“ **President John Magufuli's policies are aggressively eroding the diversity and robustness of online media in Tanzania and by extension East Africa.** ”

TCRA spokesperson Semu Mwakyanjala today told CPJ that reports the registration process was expensive were exaggerated and said that the government was acting in "good faith to recognise" content providers. He said that about 50 content providers had been registered since the regulations were issued in March. Information minister Harrison Mwakyembe could not be reached on his mobile phone for comment.

Jamii Forums co-founder, Maxence Melo, told CPJ that complying with the online content regulations would mean betraying the guarantee of anonymity that users, [some of them whistleblowers](#), expect from the platform.

The content rules were initially meant to [take effect on May 5](#), but were temporarily stopped following a legal suit by Jamii Forums and a group of rights organisations, according to [media reports](#). The country's High Court reversed this decision on May 27, saying that the applicants had not sufficiently demonstrated their standing in the case, according to court documents seen by CPJ.



Tanzania cracks down on freedom of speech

1 May 2018



Elsie Eyakuze, the publisher of the *The Mikocheni Report* blog, which has been live since 2008, in May [announced](#) that she was "icing" the blog on account of the new regulations, [according to a statement](#) on the website and a [Reuters report](#).

In April, the [BBC reported](#) that Krantz Mwantepele, whose [website Mwanaharakati Mzalendo](#) covers politics and social issues, was concerned that he would have to lay off some of his staff because of the regulations.

During the presidency of John Magufuli, CPJ has documented an increase in hostility towards the media in Tanzania, including [newspaper shutdowns](#), [hefty fines](#) imposed on television stations, and the [disappearance](#) of an investigative journalist, Azory Gwanda, in November 2017.

Jamii Forums was also accused of obstructing justice for refusing to reveal the identities of [whistleblowers](#) and for hosting a domain outside of Tanzania, which led to three separate and prolonged court cases, according to research by the Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and South Africa (CIPESA). The company's founders were acquitted of the charges in one of the cases on June 1, but hearings for two other cases are ongoing, according to CIPESA and Melo.