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Centre for Human Rights
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PRESS STATEMENT

THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: THE CENTRE CALLS ON THE SENEGALESE GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT DIGITAL RIGHTS

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The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria (Centre) is deeply concerned about the political situation currently unfolding in Senegal. Following President Macky Sall's [announcement](#) on 3 February 2024 annulling the presidential elections earlier set for 25 February 2024, the actions of the Senegalese Government have continued to threaten digital rights in Senegal. The annulment is one of the most recent developments in a series of [actions](#) taken by the government leading up to the presidential elections over the past year. These actions include internet shutdowns, attacks on media practitioners and violent crackdowns on public protests. These actions violate various human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and political participation as guaranteed in domestic national laws and under international treaties ratified by Senegal.

The Centre reminds the Senegalese Government of its obligation to protect human rights provided for in binding international and domestic standards including the Senegalese Constitution of 2001, the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights (Charter) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Covenant). Other instruments to be considered by Senegal include the Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa (Guidelines) and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (Declaration).

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Article 10 of the Constitution, article 19 of the Covenant, principle 27 of the Guidelines and principle 38 of the Declaration guarantee the right to freedom of expression and require State parties including Senegal to ensure non-interference of the free flow of information. However, between March 2021 and February 2024, the Senegalese Ministry of Communications, Telecommunications and Digital Economy has [ordered](#) internet shutdowns five times. The most recent [order](#) was given on 13 February 2024. When these shutdowns occur, human rights are [adversely affected](#) and democratic governance is at grave risk. Internet shutdowns also have negative economic impacts. According to [NetBlocks](#), an estimate of CFA 4.8 billion (USD 7.9 million) is lost for each day of internet shutdown.

In addition to this, article 11 of the Constitution, article 19 of the Covenant, and principle 20 of the Declaration guarantee the freedom and safety of the press and media practitioners. In Senegal, there have been [several reports](#) of attacks on media practitioners including closing of media houses, harassment and torture of journalists. In February 2024 alone, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 25 journalists were detained or tear-gassed during protests over the country's delayed elections.

Furthermore, article 8 of the Senegalese Constitution, article 11 of the Charter and article 21 of the Covenant guarantee the right to freedom of assembly. In February 2024, at least three persons were killed and more than 266 were arrested during [protests](#) against President Mall's postponement of the elections. The Centre notes with great concern the ongoing violent crackdown on public protests by Senegalese authorities.

The Centre for Human Rights strongly condemns these actions and urgently calls on the Senegalese government to:

1. Protect digital rights as guaranteed under relevant international and domestic human rights standards;
2. Ensure free, open and interoperable internet access before, during and after elections;
3. Guarantee the safety of protesters and media practitioners, investigate the use of force against them by state institutions, and hold those responsible accountable;
4. Ensure that free, fair, and transparent elections are held expeditiously in alignment with relevant provisions of the law;
5. Comply with the Constitutional Council's decision of 15 February 2024 on President Mall's annulment of the upcoming elections; and
6. Ratify the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, 2007.

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