



webinar

Civic Space and Electoral Rights in Ethiopia Ahead of the 2026 Elections

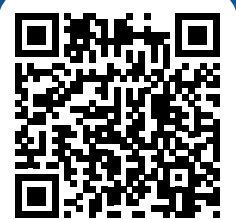
A discussion on the African Commission's decision in *Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights & IHRDA v Ethiopia* (Communication 599/16)

20 MAY 2026 | 15:00 - 17:00 SAST

All participants must register on Zoom

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SCAN TO REGISTER



The Centre for Human Rights (the CHR), University of Pretoria, in collaboration with the Kennedy Human Rights Center and the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), invites you to a webinar examining the decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on violations of the right to vote and civic space rights in Ethiopia's 2015 general elections, under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The discussion will be framed in light of Ethiopia's forthcoming general election on 1 June 2026, with a focus on whether, and to what extent, the respondent state has addressed the violations identified by the Commission and complied with its recommendations.

Background

During its 77th Ordinary Session, held from 19 October to 9 November 2023, the African Commission delivered a landmark decision in the case of *Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and Institute for Human Rights in Africa (IHRDA) v The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (Communication 599/16). The case addressed the conduct of Ethiopia's 2015 general elections, with particular focus on restrictions on civic space before and during that electoral process.

The Commission found that Ethiopia violated several rights under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, including freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, as well as the right to participate in government. It held that the use of repressive laws alongside intimidation and violence against journalists, opposition figures, and peaceful protesters undermined the integrity of the electoral process. These violations were found to be inconsistent with Articles 1, 9, 10, 11, and 13(1) of the African Charter.

Importantly, the decision affirms that restrictions on civic space directly impair the effective exercise of the right to vote. The Commission recommended that Ethiopia undertake legal and institutional reforms and report, within 180 days, on the steps taken to comply with its recommendations.

As Ethiopia approaches the 2026 elections, this decision provides a critical framework for assessing progress. Recent reports from civil society organisations and media continue to raise concerns about internet shutdowns, restrictions on civil society activities, and limitations on dissenting expressions in the country. Additionally, ongoing armed conflicts in certain regions, as well

as political and ethnic polarisation, present further challenges to an inclusive and credible electoral process.

This webinar will therefore examine whether Ethiopia has made meaningful progress in addressing the violations identified by the Commission and what the current conditions mean for the credibility, inclusiveness, and participatory nature of the forthcoming elections.

The CHR is organising this webinar with its partners as part of its ongoing project on access to information and elections in Africa, in support of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa.



Objectives

This webinar aims to:



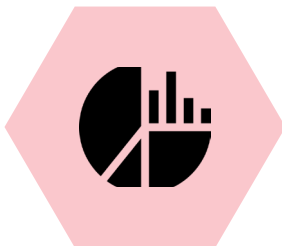
Discuss the findings of the Commission in relation to Ethiopia's 2015 general elections, and their implications for civic space and electoral rights



Assess the measures Ethiopia has taken since the decision to comply with the Commission's recommendations, particularly those aimed at addressing the violations identified in the 2015 elections.



Examine current civic space conditions in the period immediately preceding the 1 June 2026 election, and consider whether they reflect improvement, stagnation, or regression when compared to the situation during the 2015 elections.



Analyse the implications of reported restrictions, including on digital space and civil society activity, for the conduct of a free, fair, and participatory election.



Discuss how armed conflicts in some regions, as well as political and ethnic polarisation, may affect civic space, voter participation, public debate, and the overall integrity of the 1 June 2026 election.



Reflect on the broader relevance of the decision for strengthening electoral integrity and rights protection across African Union member states.

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Target audience

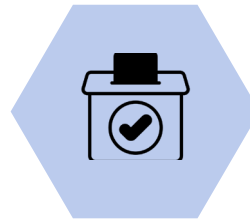
The webinar is intended for:



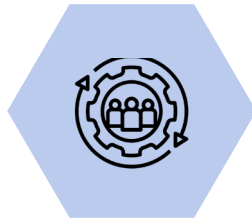
Civil society
organisations and
human rights defenders



Legal practitioners and
academics



Election observers and
governance experts



Policymakers and
representatives of
regional bodies

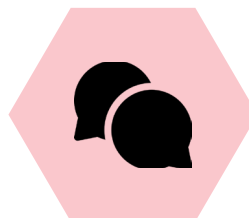


Students and
researchers in human
rights and electoral
governance.

Expected outcomes



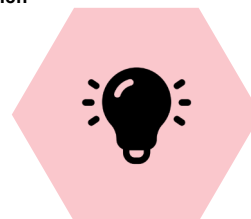
Increased awareness
of the African
Commission's decision
and its implications for
electoral rights



Enhanced dialogue
among stakeholders
on civic space and
democratic participation
in Ethiopia



Identification of key
advocacy and policy
priorities ahead of the
2026 elections



Strengthened
understanding of the
role of regional human
rights mechanisms in
electoral processes.

Event details

Time	Session	Speakers and roles
15:00 – 15:10	Welcome remarks	<p>Dr Sabelo Gumedze, <i>Assistant Director, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria,</i></p> <p>Ikechukwu Uzoma, <i>Senior Staff Attorney Africa, Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center</i></p>
15:10 – 15:30	Keynote Address	<p>Hon. Commissioner Ourveena Geerasha Topsy-Sonoo, <i>Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa</i></p>
		<p>Chair/moderator</p> <p>Belinda Matore, <i>Project Officer, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria</i></p> <p>Decision briefing (10 minutes): <i>Representative of the complainants (IHRDA and Kennedy HRC)</i></p> <p>Panel Members (50 minutes total)</p> <p>Dr Mesenbet Assefa Tadeg, <i>Independent Researcher and Consultant</i></p> <p>Michael Gyan Nyarko, <i>Deputy Executive Director, IHRDA</i></p> <p>Ikechukwu Uzoma, Senior Staff Attorney Africa, <i>Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center</i></p> <p>Dr Ivy Gikonyo, <i>Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria</i></p> <p>Noah Yesuf Yimer, <i>Human Rights Practitioner</i></p>
15:30 – 16:30	Panel discussion	
16:30 – 16:50	Questions and answers	All speakers and participants
16:50 – 17:00	Closing remarks	Michael Gyan Nyarko, Deputy Executive Director, IHRDA

For more information, please contact:

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