

Tanzanian regime tortures East African activists

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Two East African activists, Kenyan human rights campaigner Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan journalist Agather Atuhairi, were abducted, detained without charge, and subjected to brutal torture and sexual violence by Tanzanian security last month.

They travelled to Tanzania in an act of solidarity with opposition leader Tundu Lissu, who is facing a trumped-up treason trial for speaking out against the government. He is being prosecuted for speaking to the press about electoral manipulation and the corruption of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) government.

Mwangi and Atuhairi had travelled to Tanzania as part of a delegation of regional activists and lawyers to observe the court proceedings of Lissu on May 19. They were abducted from their hotel in Dar es Salaam, held incommunicado for several days, and tortured.

In a statement to the press May 26 following his release to Kenya, Mwangi explained, “They blindfolded me. They stripped me naked. They tied my hands, my feet, and then they tied me upside down. They started beating my feet... I was screaming so hard. I couldn’t breathe. They were inserting objects in my backside. They put lubricant in my rectum and started inserting objects in my backside.”

He added that “they forced me to shout ‘Asante Samia’ [Thank you, Samia] and when I did not, they would beat me more.” President Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania’s first woman president, was widely hailed by the international press, Western governments, and liberal NGOs simply for being a woman in high office. Her ascent was celebrated as a triumph for gender equality and democratic reform. But she has continued and institutionalized the police-state methods of her predecessor, John Magufuli. Mwangi added that “they recorded the entire abuse, threatening if I spoke, they would share the footage”.

Agather Atuhairi said, “They removed all my clothes

and left me in my underwear. They beat me. Then I was taken to a clinic, and they inserted stuff into me. I don’t know what it was.” She described the aftermath: “The soles of my feet felt so swollen and tight that I thought if I stepped on something, they would burst.” For three days, she could barely walk.

Mwangi stressed, “Our torturers were acting on orders from a ‘state security’ employee who came to Immigration offices and followed us to Central Police Station and ordered we should be taken to a secret location to be given a ‘Tanzanian treatment’.”

These abuses mark a sharp escalation in the violent and repressive methods employed by the ruling CCM to crush opposition in the lead-up to national elections scheduled for October 28. The CCM has been in uninterrupted power since independence.

Once the party of Julius Nyerere’s Ujamaa, advancing a nationalist programme of limited social reforms and state-led development, the CCM has long since abandoned even the pretence of socialism. Under the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, it embraced neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, dismantling public services and privatising key sectors of the economy.

What remains today is a capitalist state ruled by a narrow elite that has profited from the exploitation of Tanzania’s vast agricultural lands and mineral wealth, including gold, uranium, and rare earths, while most of the population is mired in poverty. The working class and rural poor face unbearable conditions: skyrocketing food prices, decaying infrastructure, collapsing healthcare and education systems, and joblessness that particularly affects the youth.

To defend these interests, the state relies on the machinery of surveillance, arbitrary detention, and political terror. The regime’s fear is not simply about the bankrupt opposition parties, but of an explosion from

below, a mass uprising by workers, youth, and rural masses. The memory of last year's Gen Z-led protests, which erupted across Kenya and electrified the region, continues to haunt East Africa's ruling elites.

This violent episode is also an indictment of the broader East African ruling elite. Atuhairi hails from Uganda, where the dictatorship of Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled without interruption since 1986, is escalating repression ahead of the 2026 presidential elections. This saw the recent abduction and torture of Eddie Mutwe, bodyguard to opposition leader Bobi Wine, by Museveni's son and military chief General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who boasted of using Mutwe as a "punching bag".

Mwangi comes from Kenya, where President William Ruto's administration, now effectively in alliance with the former opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), has intensified repression. In mid-2024, youth-led protests erupted nationwide against the proposed Finance Bill 2024, which sought to increase taxes on essential goods amid a deepening cost-of-living crisis. The state's response was brutal: at least 65 protesters were killed by police, over 1,500 were unlawfully arrested, and 89 individuals were disappeared, with many still unaccounted for months later. Ruto's government deployed live ammunition against protesters, carried out mass arbitrary detentions, and orchestrated abductions through plainclothes security agents using unmarked vehicles. It has even targeted schoolchildren plays critical of his regime.

Last year Kenya, in coordinated efforts with the Ugandan regime, allowed Kizza Besigye, leader of Uganda's Forum for Democratic Change and head of the official opposition in parliament, to be abducted in Nairobi, thrown in a van and transferred to Kampala. He has now spent six months in detention on fabricated treason charges.

Above all, the torture of Mwangi and Atuhairi is an indictment of the main imperialist backers of the regimes of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, the United States and Britain. Both have formally expressed "concern" over the recent torture allegations.

The US Bureau of African Affairs said on X, "We call for an immediate and full investigation into the allegations of human rights abuses," urging "all countries in the region to hold to account those responsible for violating human rights, including torture."

The same US State Department is backing Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, where more than 50,000

Palestinians have been killed, entire families annihilated, and nearly every hospital, school, university and place of worship reduced to rubble. Washington has supplied Israel with bombs, artillery, intelligence, and political cover while vetoing every UN resolution demanding a ceasefire. In Eastern Europe, Washington's has instigated the bloody proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, which has already claimed over half a million lives, and is preparing a catastrophic confrontation with China in the South Pacific. Across the Middle East, it sustains the most reactionary regimes, from Egypt to Saudi Arabia to the Gulf monarchies, that imprison, torture, and execute their own citizens with impunity.

Bolstered by the Trump administration's efforts to install a dictatorship in the US, East African regimes are resorting to state terror. Mwangi and Atuhairi have spoken out bravely, but their case is just one of countless others. Their prominence as foreign nationals ensured some media attention. Yet many Tanzanians, especially youth and political activists, have disappeared or been tortured in silence.

Workers and youth across East Africa must see in these events the brutal reality of capitalist rule in its most naked form. These coordinated assaults by the ruling class across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda must be met with the coordinated resistance of the working class across borders and ethnic divisions.

This struggle cannot be entrusted to the bankrupt bourgeois opposition parties, which posture as defenders of democracy while upholding capitalism and seeking only a larger share of the spoils. They uphold the very same police state structures that persecute them. What is required is the building of a socialist movement of the working class, armed with a revolutionary programme to overthrow the capitalist order, expropriate the wealth of the elite, and establish genuine democratic control over society's resources in the interests of the majority.



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