

Tanzanian regime bans Gen-Z Saba Saba protests, deploys army and police

Kipchumba Ochieng
5 July 2026

President Samia Suluhu Hassan's Tanzanian government has banned all political rallies and demonstrations ahead of nationwide protests called for Tuesday July 7, Saba Saba Day, the anniversary of the 1954 founding of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), predecessor of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM).

The crackdown follows calls by Gen-Z activists and protesters, circulated on social media, to use Saba Saba Day to demand constitutional reform and accountability for the massacre that followed last October's fraudulent election. Security forces killed as many as 3,000 protesters after Hassan was declared the winner with an implausible 98 percent of the vote. The official underestimate is 518 dying from "unnatural causes".

The movement has no visible leadership and no single organisation behind it. Since October it has organised through decentralised WhatsApp and Telegram networks whose users avoid public profiles, aware that identifying themselves invites arrest, as happened to several WhatsApp group administrators detained in November on charges of "organising and promoting crime."

Justifying the crackdown before parliament, Home Affairs Minister Patrobas Katambi Katambi ranted, "We have arrested some people with weapons and others with petrol containers," adding that the government did not want a repeat of "what happened" last October.

The official narrative is that the October protests were sparked by outside agitators, rather than the real driving forces: soaring living costs, austerity measures and police-state violence, pushing workers and youth into struggle.

The ban is being enforced by a massive mobilisation of soldiers, police units and water cannons across Dar es Salaam and other major cities, with checkpoints established at locations expected to draw crowds—concentrated on the working-class districts of Kimara, Ubungu, Magomeni, Kinondoni and Tandale that were the epicentre of last October's unrest, alongside similar deployments in Arusha, Mwanza and Mbeya. Police have renewed warnings that organising online constitutes a criminal offence.

The ban reveals a regime terrified of its own population. After stealing an election and unleashing the bloodiest repression in Tanzania's post-independence history, the CCM state cannot permit even the slightest sign of opposition from workers and the rural poor. Even anniversaries, public holidays and official celebrations—rituals it has staged for decades to sanctify its own

rule—have become intolerable.

Opposition parties have denounced Tuesday's ban. Chadema's head of foreign affairs, John Kitoka, wrote on X that "the regime's answer to growing public demand for freedom is fear, intimidation, and repression," branding the directive unconstitutional. The party's chief legal counsel, Rugemeleza Nshala, said the ban was intended to "muzzle political freedom," and confirmed that Chadema was weighing legal challenges.

Chadema's own chairperson, Tundu Lissu, remains in detention after more than fourteen months, facing fraudulent treason charges that carry the death penalty, while the party remains barred from electoral participation until 2030.

ACT-Wazalendo, Tanzania's third-largest party that claims to be the true inheritor of Nyerere's "African Socialism", likewise announced it would challenge the ban in court. Its shadow minister for Defence, Internal Affairs and Security, Rashid Ali, said, "This directive is not only an attempt to continue pushing the country further into darkness and to prevent the lawful activities of political parties; it is also a continuation of the rulers' violation of Article 20(1) of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania and Article 23(1)(a) and (b) of the Political Parties Act". The party pledged to take legal action to challenge the directive.

Legal appeals to a constitution the regime tramples at will offer no way forward. Nor do Chadema's and ACT-Wazalendo's repeated appeals to the "international community"—by which they mean the imperialist powers and institutions such as the United Nations, South African Development Community and the African Union—to impose sanctions and install a transitional government.

This is the programme of a capitalist faction that fears mobilising workers and rural masses against the CCM regime and seeks to have imperialism install it in office. Chadema, no less than ACT-Wazalendo, represents sections of the Tanzanian business elite seeking a larger share of the spoils of foreign investment. Its programme of tax cuts and a "conducive environment for investors" in mining, oil and gas offers the youth no way out.

Hassan is desperately manoeuvring to secure her regime through deepening ties with China and Russia.

In June, Hassan made the first state visit by a Tanzanian president to Moscow since Julius Nyerere in 1969, meeting Vladimir Putin, receiving an honorary doctorate, and unveiling plans for over \$2 billion in Russian investment, centred on Rosatom's \$1.2 billion Mkuju River uranium project. Direct flights between Dar es Salaam and Moscow began this month.

This follows years of deepening economic ties with China, now Tanzania's largest trading partner and principal financier of major infrastructure projects. Hassan presents this orientation as "non-alignment," insisting that Tanzania works with all countries and takes no side. It reflects the calculations of a bourgeois regime that has turned to Beijing for more favourable loans, investment and commercial agreements after receiving little from increasingly hostile Western powers.

However, such a policy no more offers a path to genuine national liberation than Nyerere's "African Socialism" did six decades ago.

Washington and Brussels have escalated pressure on Hassan. In May, the State Department designated Tanzania's Senior Assistant Commissioner Faustine Jackson Mafwele, banning him from the US over his role in the abduction, torture and sexual assault of Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan activist Agather Atuhaire, both seized in Dar es Salaam while observing Lissu's treason trial.

Days earlier, Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Ted Cruz introduced the Reassessing the US-Tanzania Bilateral Relationship Act, which passed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on June 17 and now awaits a full Senate vote. The Senate's press release makes explicit the geopolitical calculation underlying all the human rights rhetoric. The bill claims to respond to "democratic backsliding, political repression, human rights abuses and growing concerns about Chinese influence in Tanzania," and it directs the State Department to "evaluate the extent of the People's Republic of China's military, economic and political engagement in Tanzania, including cooperation that could undermine democratic institutions and U.S. interests in the region."

When the Senate advanced a substitute version to drop the original bill's proposed cut to security and military cooperation, it broadened this mandate into a review of Tanzania's "growing diplomatic and commercial ties with China and Russia."

Brussels has moved on a parallel track. In November, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning the killings and demanding Lissu's immediate and unconditional release. David McAllister, chair of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, said that the European Union (EU) should "use every tool at our disposal to hold those in power accountable," and separately demanded that "all EU funds must be stopped immediately." In June 2026, after Dodoma refused entry to a European Parliament human rights delegation, the Parliament voted to keep €156 million in EU funding frozen.

The very same imperialist powers now posturing over Tanzanian lives arm and finance the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, wage a proxy war against Russia that has killed hundreds of thousands, and operate a Fortress Europe that has turned the Mediterranean into a mass grave for African migrants. Their sudden concern is a cover for their scramble for the country's nickel, graphite, uranium and rare earths, and to deny China and Russia a firmer foothold in East Africa.

Moreover, even as the sanctions and aid freezes were being debated, Tanzanian and US officials continued negotiating three flagship American-linked projects: a \$42 billion LNG export terminal led by Shell, Equinor and ExxonMobil; the \$942 million

Tembo Nickel project, developed with Kabanga Nickel to supply battery-grade material for the electric vehicle industry; and the \$300 million Mahenge graphite project run by Australia's Black Rock Mining. The EU flagged its own interest in the Epanko graphite project.

The imperialist powers are clearly cultivating Chadema, and Lissu personally, as their preferred vehicle inside Tanzania. Every EU resolution on Tanzania since May 2025 has named Lissu and demanded his release. Lissu lived for six years of exile in Brussels and enjoys personal ties to European officials. The American Shaheen-Cruz bill contains an equivalent mechanism, conditioning any restoration of US aid on a "national reconciliation process" with Chadema.

The Tanzanian working class and youth confront a corrupt bourgeois state defending itself through terror, an opposition tied to the same capitalist order, and imperialist powers competing against rising capitalist powers like China to loot the country's resources under whatever political arrangement best serves them. None of these forces offers a way forward.

What is posed is the same task that confronted Tanganyika's militant working class in the 1940s and 1950s and that TANU, Nyerere and every subsequent CCM government have worked to suppress: its independent political mobilisation in a struggle for socialism.

Courage in the face of tanks, curfews and internet blackouts must be coupled with a revolutionary socialist programme and leadership. One that links the fight against the CCM dictatorship to the struggle against imperialism across the continent, as part of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Only the building of such a party, rooted in the working class and committed to the fight for the United Socialist States of Africa, can politically arm Tanzania's Gen-Z so that it can end, once and for all, sixty-four years of capitalist rule.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)