



**Press Release**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> August 2012**

### **Civil society concern at ban of newspaper in Tanzania**

Article 19, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Committee to Protect Journalists, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, Legal and Human Rights Centre, Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition and the Media Institute of Southern Africa-Tanzania, are concerned about reports that, on Monday 30 July, the government of Tanzania indefinitely banned *MwanaHalisi*, a weekly Kiswahili newspaper.

At a news conference on Monday, the acting Director of the Information, Youth, Sports and Culture Ministry reportedly accused *MwanaHalisi* of publishing seditious material, and has used the powers under *The Newspapers Act (1976)* to ban the newspaper. The Newspapers Act grants the Minister of Information broad powers to prohibit publication of newspapers for the sake of the public interest, peace and good order. This law creates offences such as sedition intention, seditious offences and false news, which are often invoked against media houses.

This is the second time *MwanaHalisi* has been blocked by the government. In October 2008, it was suspended for 90 days for allegedly publishing seditious and defamatory material. *MwanaHalisi* also reports that their editors are regularly questioned on their articles by government authorities. Other newspapers have experienced similar restrictions. In 2010, *Kulikoni*, a weekly Kiswahili newspaper was also suspended for 90 days, for its coverage of the army.

Although our organisations recognise that international standards permit the state to impose reasonable restrictions on the freedom of expression, we are concerned that the government is using the Act to restrict newspapers and media houses that are critical of the government. Suppression of peaceful and non-violent dissent is unreasonable and in contravention to Tanzania's international obligations.

At the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of Tanzania in October 2011, in response to concerns, the government pledged to guarantee the right to expression, and affirmed its obligations to promote and protect that right. As part of the same process, in March 2012 the government also stated its commitment to reviewing the laws governing freedom of the press.

We call on the Commonwealth Secretary-General to take note of recent developments and press the Tanzanian government to comply with its human rights obligations, particularly the obligation to uphold the freedom of expression.

Tanzanian legislation such as the Newspapers Act, and any other legislation that hinders fundamental freedoms, needs to be re-examined in light of international human rights principles. As the country reviews its constitution, we call upon the government of Tanzania to reaffirm the constitutional protection of freedom of expression, amend laws that do not conform to human rights standards, and ensure that press freedom and free expression are a practical reality in the country.