GICJ AFRICAN AFFAIRS

North Africa

West Africa

East Africa

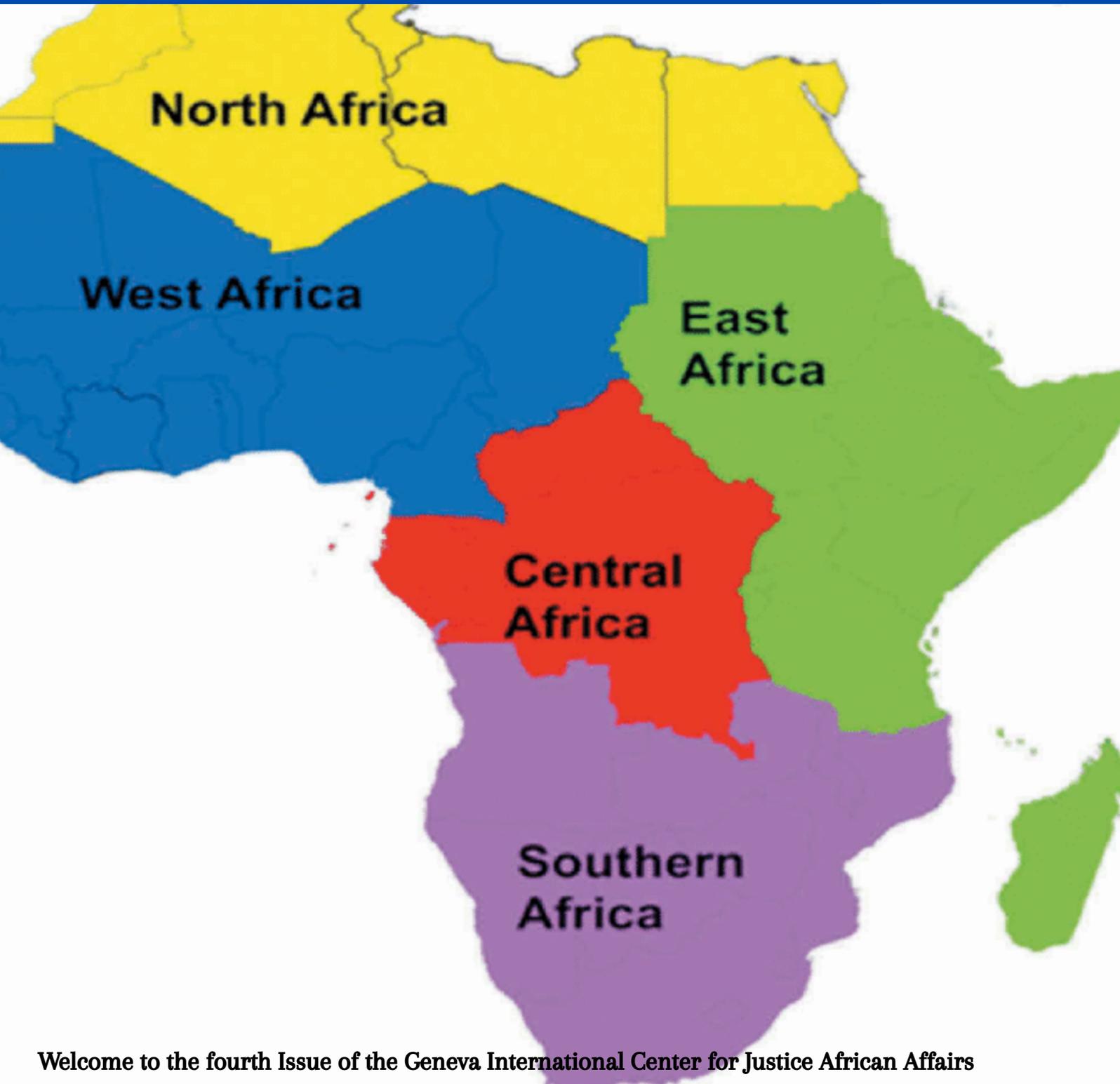Central Africa

Southern Africa

Welcome to the fourth Issue of the Geneva International Center for Justice African Affairs Newsletter. The Issue focuses on Human Rights in Africa, specifically the effects of war and conflict on the continent, Gender-based Violence and elections among others. Some of these challenges are scheduled to be discussed in the upcoming 61st Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC61) in addition to reports on progress made since the last session.

The African Union's role in civilian protection amid Sudan's displacement crisis

By Patricia Jjuuko

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has precipitated one of Africa's most severe humanitarian and displacement crises in recent history. Since the outbreak of fighting, millions of civilians have been forced to flee their homes, seeking safety within Sudan and across borders into neighbouring countries such as Chad, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Central African Republic. The scale and speed of this displacement have placed immense pressure on already fragile host communities and exposed serious gaps in regional protection mechanisms.

Beyond its humanitarian dimensions, the crisis represents a profound human rights emergency. Civilians have been subjected to widespread violations, including attacks on populate areas, sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary killings, and the obstruction of humanitarian assistance. Displacement in this context is not merely a consequence of conflict, but a direct result of systematic failures to protect fundamental rights to life, dignity, safety, and health.

As the continent's primary political and normative body, the African Union (AU) carries a critical responsibility in responding to crises of this magnitude. Through its legal and policy frameworks on forced displacement, peace, and human security, the AU has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to protecting civilians, preventing mass atrocities, and promoting durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Yet the unfolding crisis in Sudan raises a pressing question: is the AU translating these commitments into meaningful protection for those uprooted by conflict? On paper, the AU's normative architecture on forced displacement is robust. The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) adopted in 2019 is the s the world's first legally binding regional instrument on internal displacement. It obliges states not only to prevent displacement and protect IDPs during crises, but also to respect and safeguard their human rights including access to humanitarian assistance, protection from violence, and participation in decisions affecting their futures. Sudan's status as signatory to the Convention renders its provisions directly applicable to the current crisis.

Beyond the Kampala Convention, the AU's broader human rights framework, anchored in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights reinforces the indivisibility of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Forced displacement, when left unaddressed,

undermines all of these rights simultaneously. The AU's peace and security frameworks further recognize that civilian protection and respect for human rights are prerequisites for sustainable peace, not optional add-ons on political settlements.

Collectively, these instruments position AU as a key actor in coordinating regional responses, mobilizing diplomatic pressure, and ensuring that displacement protection remains central to conflict resolution efforts.

However, the scale of Sudan's displacement crisis demands more than normative leadership. It requires decisive political action grounded in human rights principles. The African Union must move beyond declaratory commitments and assert a more proactive and coordinated response. This entails activating the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to prioritize civilian protection and humanitarian access, and accountability for violations in its deliberations on Sudan. The PSC should treat attacks on civilians and forced displacement as threats to continental peace and security, warranting sustained attention and action.

Equally critic is strengthening coordination with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to harmonize regional mediation, refugee protection, and responsibility sharing among host states. Human rights considerations must be embedded within mediation efforts, ensuring that ceasefires, political negotiations, and transitional arrangements address civilian protection and the rights of displaced populations from the outset. The AU must also leverage the preventive diplomacy of the Panel of the Wise to advocate for humanitarian pauses, respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, and the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and the elderly.

At the global level, the AU must also strategically mobilize the A3 at the United Nations Security Council to elevate African led perspectives on civilian protection and displacement. Coordinated engagement by the A3 can help counter geopolitical inertia, push for stronger protection mandates, and reinforce the principle that large-scale displacement and rights violations in Africa demand urgent and sustained international action.

Ultimately, the crisis in Sudan represents a critical test of the African Union's credibility as a guardian of human rights and human security on the continent. The challenge facing the AU is not the absence of legal frameworks or institutional mechanisms, but the political resolve to deploy them effectively. Failure to do so risks further eroding trust in continental institutions and condemning millions of displaced Sudanese civilians to prolonged insecurity and neglect at a moment when African leadership is most urgently needed.

A CRISIS BENEATH THE SURFACE: GALAMSEY, HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL HARM IN GHANA

By Woko Kwaku Tamakloe

On Monday 22nd September 2025, Ghanaians lined the streets of Accra; in protest of illegal mining activities in the country. The movement, led by activist and private legal practitioner; Oliver Barker-Vormawor, aimed to call attention to the environmental degradation caused by illegal mining activities and to highlight the shortcomings of the country's leaders. This comes on the heels of another protest held a year prior that brought the issue to the minds of many Ghanaians who were either unaware of the reality of the situation or were living in willful ignorance. Outrage over the current state of the nation intensified as protestors took to social media to voice their concerns, causing the hashtag, StopGalamseyNow to begin trending on X.

The mining of gold in itself is not necessarily a bad thing; In fact, the Ghana Gold Board reported that, as of 2025, gold mining mobilized US$10 billion in foreign exchange revenue for the country which greatly boosted external reserves and macroeconomic stability, keeping Ghana among the top mineral producing countries in Africa. Though it is difficult to tell how much of the aforementioned gold was obtained legally, it is safe to say gold is of great value to Ghanaians and Ghana as a whole.

Photo Credit: Paul Beiber

However, the financial benefits cannot over shadow the consequences illegal mining, locally known as "Galamsey;" (a term meaning "to gather and sell;)" has on the environment and the people living around the dig sites. Galamsey innocently began as Traditional Artisanal Mining (TAM), which is a time honoured, low-tech, environmentally friendly and an innovation of the

local mining communities; it involves digging shallow pits, using simple tools to collect gold. Though TAM remains a source of income in many rural communities, the surge of gold prices and foreign influx, seeking to make more money by mining illegally, have caused the once harmless practice to grow into an informal industry largely characterized by environmental degradation and socioeconomic issues.
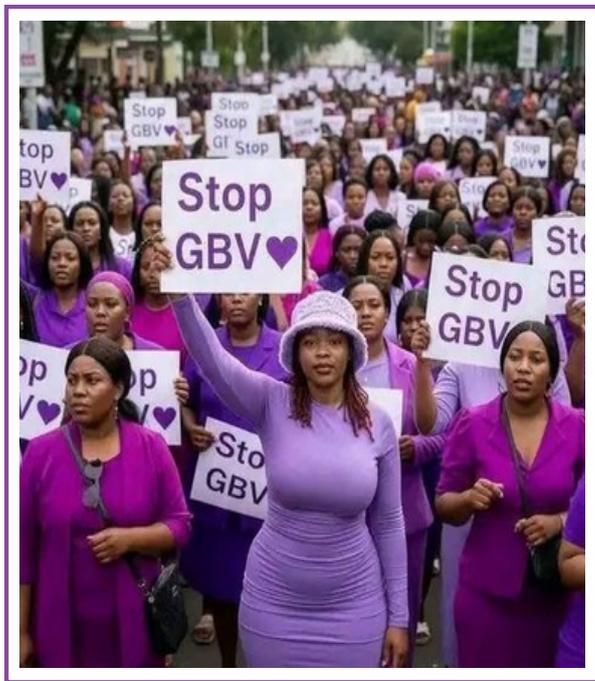

Photo Credit: Paul Beiber

The Mercury and Other Heavy Metals Impact Assessment carried out by Pure Earth and the Environmental Protection Agency from August 2024 to September 2025, found high levels of poisonous metals, such as mercury, arsenic and lead to be present in the soil, water air, crops and fish in and around mining communities across the country. This observation stands as a public health and environmental crisis, threatening the health and safety of all individuals living and working around these mining sites. Additionally, the unstable working conditions miners work through exposes them to chemicals and heavy machinery that may cause injury and, in some cases, even death. As of January to July 2025, Ghana has reported at least 17 deaths linked directly to illegal mining activities.

The state of Galamsey in Ghana highlights "a chronic problem in Ghanaian politics: ethical inconsistency and opportunism," as observed by the Centre for Democratic Movement (CDM) due to opposition leaders voicing highly critical views of ruling administration's handling of the crisis only to come into power and do nothing about the situation.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in South Africa: A National Disaster!

By Teboho Mosebo

On 20 November 2025, President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa officially declared gender-based violence a national disaster at the G20 social summit hosted by his country. He underscored the extraordinary and concerted action that will be required to end it. The move came after a wave of protests that began weeks earlier online, where activists flooded social media with the colour purple – the symbol of the #G20WomenShutdown campaign – urging people to withdraw from all economic activities for one day and to lie down in silence for 15 minutes at noon in honour of the 15 women murdered each day in the country. On 21 November 2025, the online call turned into a nationwide street action. Women, men, universities, civil society organizations and allies took to the streets across the country, wearing either purple or black as a visual representation of mourning and solidarity, demanding urgent government action.

Source: Facebook

South Africa faces a shocking and persistent epidemic of GBV. Although this is a universal phenomenon, South Africa experiences some of the world's highest levels of GBV, particularly against women and children—with the rate at which women are killed being five times higher than the global average, according to UN Women.

The Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) 2024 national GBV survey paints a grim backdrop: one-third of women over 18 have experienced physical violence, one-quarter have endured emotional abuse, and one-eighth have suffered financial abuse. Sexual violence is reported by 9.8 percentage of women, and over a third have faced either physical or sexual violence. These figures are not evenly spread – black African women, women with disabilities, older women and LGBTQIA+ women are the main victims of such violence.

Causes

Gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa is deeply rooted in patriarchal societal structures, cultural traditions, and power imbalances. The way males are raised to exert power and control over women contributes significantly to the prevalence of GBV. Harmful cultural practices, such as lobola, can perpetuate the notion that women are possessions, blurring the lines of consent. Also, alcohol is a key factor in gender-based violence, not as a direct cause but by lowering inhibitions, increasing aggression, and impairing judgment in already violent individuals. The media's focus on victim-blaming rather than perpetrator accountability further entrenches GBV. Additionally, limited access to support services, inadequate law enforcement, and societal attitudes that normalize violence against women exacerbate the problem.

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

From 25 November to 10 December 2025 South Africa observed the annual 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children under the theme "**Letsema: Men, Women, Boys and Girls working together to end GBVF.**" Launched by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, the campaign marked the 27th anniversary of the UN-led initiative and ties into the Positive Masculinity Dialogue on the margins of the G20 ministerial meeting.

During the 16-day campaign, government, civil society, and private sector partners held community dialogues, awareness drives, and a pledge-signing campaign to challenge harmful cultural norms, encourage reporting of abuse, and support survivors. As a representative of GICJ, I participated in one of these campaigns in Bloemfontein under the theme "Not in my name," where men gathered to discuss and confront GBV issues.

Read more about Gender-Based Violence in South Africa from the resources below:

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn979g302l9o

https://safpj.co.za/index.php/safpj/article/view/5729/7927

https://www.gov.za/16DaysOfActivism2025

https://hsrc.ac.za/news/review/violence-against-women-in-south-africa-intersecting-vulnerabilities/

Abductions and Fatal Attacks Threaten Civilians in Nigeria

By Melodi Nnaji

Nigeria has experienced a troubling surge in violent abductions and attacks that have left civilians living in fear, disrupted education, strained communities across multiple states and led to loss of hundreds of lives. In 2025, armed groups carried out a series of kidnappings targeting schools, villages, worshippers, farmers and travellers. Many victims were held for days or weeks; some were later released through rescue operations, while others remain missing or were killed. These events have highlighted persistent security challenges, particularly in the country's northern and central regions and have drawn attention from international human rights organisations and concerned citizens across social media platforms.

Classrooms are empty because school children fear being abducted from school. *Photo credit: Google*

Patterns of Abduction and Fatal Attacks

On 17 November 2025, unidentified gunmen stormed the Government Girls Comprehensive Secondary School in Maga town, Kebbi State. According to BBC News, 25 female students were abducted from their boarding facility. Reports indicate that the school's vice-principal was killed while attempting to protect the students and a security guard was also wounded.

Families and residents were in panic as the community scrambled to locate the missing girls.

On 21 November 2025, a larger-scale attack occurred in Papiri, Niger State, when armed men raided St Mary's Catholic School. The Christian Association of Nigeria reported that more than 300 students and 12 teachers were abducted. Parents and neighbors were left in deep distress as they searched for information about their children's whereabouts. On 8 December, Nigerian authorities announced the release of 100 students, and between 21 and 22 December confirmed that the remaining captives had been freed and reunited with their families after weeks in captivity.

Beyond schools, armed groups have also targeted places of worship and public spaces. In Kogi State, worshippers attending a morning church service in Ejiba, Yagba West Local Government Area, were abducted on 30 November, including a pastor and his wife, reinforcing concerns that civilians are vulnerable even in religious settings.

The violence has escalated to murder. Between 13 and 14 June 2025, gunmen attacked Yelewata community in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, in what has become known as the *Yelewata massacre*. Homes were set ablaze and residents were attacked in their sleep. Reports indicated that an estimated 150 to 200 people were killed, with thousands forced to flee their homes, marking one of the deadliest incidents affecting civilians in recent years.

Human Rights Implications for Civilians and Affected Communities

The wave of abductions and fatal attacks across Nigeria is a violation human rights. Civilians are killed in their homes, on farmlands, in churches or while travelling. In some attacks, entire families have been wiped out during night raids, while survivors are left to bury loved ones and rebuild their lives amid deep trauma and loss.

Amnesty International noted that the repeated abductions of schoolchildren and teachers threaten the fundamental human right to education, forcing many students to abandon classrooms and leading parents to question whether it is safe to send their children back to school. The closures have contributed to a persistent educational crisis in parts of northern Nigeria.

In several affected areas, homes and villages have been burned, leaving survivors displaced and economically devastated. These conditions undermine not only the right to property and livelihood, but also the right to live in dignity.

For those who survive abduction, testimonies reveal violations of the right to freedom from torture and from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Former captives have described being forced to trek long distances through forests, living in makeshift camps without adequate shelter, food or medical care and enduring threats, beatings and psychological abuse. The consequences extend beyond direct victims, as communities face anxiety and uncertainty over their safety.

Responses by the Government and NGOs

Nigerian authorities have taken a number of steps in response to the crisis. President Bola Tinubu declared a nationwide security emergency after the wave of mass kidnappings and ordered the redeployment of police from VIP duties to community and counter-insurgency operations. Security forces, including the military and tactical units, intensified search and rescue missions in affected states, while the government announced plans to recruit additional officers to strengthen public safety.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) calls on Nigerian authorities, regional partners, and international actors to:

1. Strengthen community-based protection and early-warning systems around schools and rural communities.

2. Expand support for victims and families affected by kidnappings and violence, including psychosocial care.

3. Enhance cooperation with civil society and local leaders to build resilience and restore safe access to education and movement.

Spotlight on the 2026 Presidential Elections in Uganda

By Mildred Asiimwe

As the sun rose over Kampala on January 17, 2026, the silence in the streets was not one of peace, but of a nation held in a digital blackout.

For the seventh time in four decades, the Electoral Commission declared the incumbent Yoweri Museveni the victor, granting the 81-year-old another five years in power with 71.65% of the vote.

Two days prior, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) - the agency that licenses media operations including print, radio, television and mobile devices, had directed telecom companies to shut down internet services on January 13, citing security concerns ahead of the presidential elections. The elections for president and Members of Parliament were held on January 25, 2026. The other official bearers like local council chairpersons, municipality mayors and special interest groups were elected in the days after that.

The voter turn out as reported by the electoral Commission was 52% of the recorded 21.6 million registered voters.

The The incumbent Yoweri Museveni garnered 71.65% having stood as the candidate for the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM); Robert Kyagulanyi of the National Unity Platform Party (NUP) polled 24.72%, while Nathan Nandala Mafabi of the Forum for Democratic change (FDC) garnered 1.88%. Five other candidates contested for the presidency, including a retired Major General Mugisha Muntu under his party flagship the Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) but they garnered a combined total of less than 5% of the total votes cast.

There were several critics of the election, with the main one being the Internet Blackout that went on for four days, with the government citing the need to "prevent incitement". This left radio, television and print media as the only sources of information regarding the polls.

Three opposition candidates rejected the poll results and alleged massive ballot stuffing and kidnapping of polling staff, while human rights groups reported abductions of opposition leaders. The chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) issued a statement saying the polling day across was generally peaceful. The opposition parties filed law suits and that are yet to be heard by the courts of law as at the time of writing this article.

Other challenges reported include the malfunctioning of biometric voter identification machines, amidst claims that this was a common occurrence in areas with strong opposition stronghold. However, media reports indicate that failures were common in many parts of the country. *(www.independent.co.ug/what-ugandas-bvvk-failures-reveal-about-biometric-elections/)*

 There were reports of voters' names missing from the official registers at polling stations, despite the government embarking on a voter verification exercise for three months starting in August 2025.
International NGOs like Human Rights Watch and Freedom House have continuously expressed concern over Uganda's weakening of democratic institutions.

The chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) issued a statement saying the polling day across was generally peaceful across the country (the country, except in some areas where the media reported arrests, and deaths, and, the failure of the biometric voter verification kits. *(wwwhttps://uhrc.ug/)*

About Geneva International Center for Justice (GICJ) Africa Group

The (GICJ) Africa Group is dedicated to advocating for human rights, justice, and peace across the African continent and for people of African descent. Operating within the framework of GICJ, the Group monitors conflicts, human rights violations, and legal injustices, providing expert analysis and policy recommendations to international bodies, governments, and civil society organizations.

Address:
Chemin des Mines 2,
1202 Geneva,
Switzerland
Email: info@gicj.org
Website: www.gicj.org