
The African Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA) Condemns Internet Disruptions in Gabon and Zimbabwe Following Elections

AIRA, a leading network of Africa-based civil society organisations (CSOs) advocating for digital rights and freedoms hereby condemns the recent internet disruptions in both Gabon and Zimbabwe following their general elections.

Amidst the assault on democracy, rights and freedoms that have occurred and are still occurring in Gabon over the past few days, the announcement and implementation of an indefinite restriction of internet access in the country stands as one of the most serious. Internet shutdowns remain an egregious abuse of human rights in the 21st century and the Gabonese government's insistence that the shutdown was ordered to reduce the "risk of violence and the spreading of disinformation", once again reveals a poor appreciation of the many risks that come with an internet shutdown. Indeed, citizens' interconnection on the internet offers an opportunity for the government to disseminate factual and verifiable information, if indeed that is a concern. The government, by blocking access to the internet for three days, debunks any assumptions of election transparency and integrity.

In the same vein, we condemn the degrading of internet services by the Zimbabwe government on the eve of its elections thereby potentially affecting citizens' ability to effectively communicate with each other. We also condemn the government's raid of the data centres set up by Civil Society election observers.

The Internet remains an integral tool for public discourse, especially during critical moments such as elections therefore the deliberate disruption of Internet services is an abuse of power and a disregard for democratic values and human rights.

As more Africans go to the polls this year, we call upon African governments to uphold their end of the democratic contract and allow citizens exercise their rights and freedoms to expression, access to information and assembly as enshrined under international human rights treaties including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

While we anticipate a restoration of democratic order in Gabon, we urge the governments of Zimbabwe and Gabon to, prioritize constructive engagement with civil society organisations and refrain from such disruptions and raids in the future.

AIRA stands in solidarity with the people of Gabon and Zimbabwe and we will continue to advocate for principles of democracy, freedom of expression and open access to information in these territories.

About AIRA

AIRA is a network of Africa-based civil society organisations (CSOs) that advance digital rights. Our members are leading authorities on digital rights and internet freedom, and have a track record of evidence-based and credible engagement at national, regional, continental and global levels. We cover most of eastern, western and southern Africa and have, since formation, used our collective platform to articulate a common position on topics such as internet shutdowns, online rights and freedoms, internet governance and data protection.