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The Continent



Another AU sex scandal

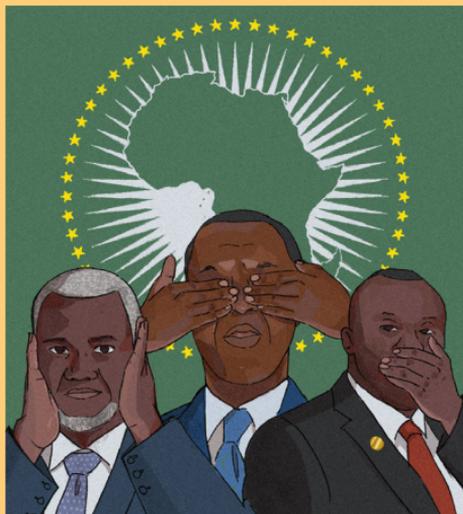
Illustration: Wynona Mutisi

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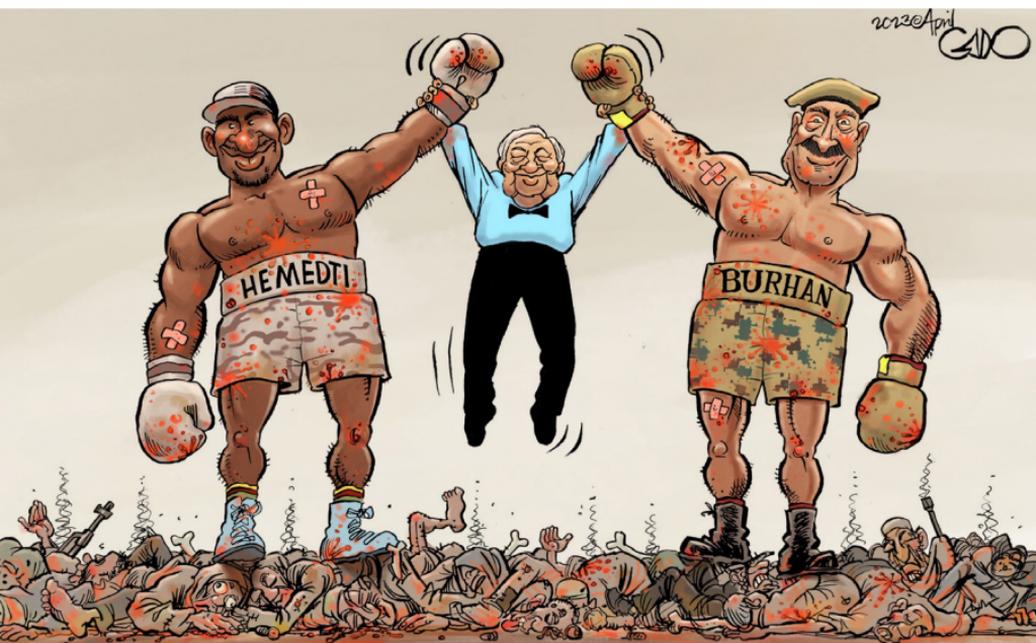
WE'RE BACK!

Welcome to year four of *The Continent*. This started as an experiment, to get quality journalism to people by using the strengths of old school newspapers combined with 21st century technology. We asked you to share it and you did – helping us build a subscriber base in at least 130 countries. With you reading, we've worked with (and paid) over 350 different journalists and storytellers across this beautiful continent. Presidents have frothed, companies have raged and we've all learned a bit more about each other. Enjoy Season 11.



Same old story: In an audio recording, the president of the Pan-African Parliament is heard telling his much younger niece: “Kiss me to motivate me”. He's been charged with sexual assault in Zimbabwe, and becomes the latest senior leader at the African Union to be implicated in a sexual assault or harassment scandal. Will he also escape with full benefits and honours? (p18)

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TUNISIA

Racist president turns to fertilisers for salvation

Tunisia's president is betting on fertilisers to get out of the corner he painted himself into, by consolidating power in the presidency, cracking down on political opponents and leaning into anti-black and anti-migrant populism. In the subsequent international fallout, Tunisia's \$2-billion bailout from the IMF didn't materialise as expected in December. Earlier this month, Kais Saïed told journalists that Tunisians should now "work on our own". Speaking to his security council this week, he called for a revival of the national phosphate company.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Crypto out as IMF approves \$191-million loan

The IMF agreed to lend the Central African Republic (CAR) \$191-million to sustain basic services like health and education, among other priorities. The loan approval came a month after CAR repealed legislation, which the IMF opposed, that had made crypto currency legal tender. Though rich in oil, gold and diamond deposits, the CAR's actual economy is only \$2.3-billion. Relentless insecurity combined with the Covid-19 pandemic to ground economic growth to a halt by the end of 2021.



Captain confusion: Does Ramaphosa know if SA is in or out of the ICC?

Photo: BRICS

SOUTH AFRICA

Ruling party divided on human rights

South Africa is a master of having a foot in each camp. It's a member of BRICS, the African Union and has strong relations with Western countries. But keeping everyone happy is impossible, particularly as the country's power wanes. This week, President Cyril Ramaphosa said his ruling party wanted to exit the International Criminal Court. A planned visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin – who is presiding over an invasion of Ukraine that has seen civilians raped and murdered – would force South Africa to either arrest him, or choose a camp. Ramaphosa's spokesperson later retracted the “erroneous” statement. The country has a history of ignoring the court, failing to arrest Omar al-Bashir, who presided over the deaths of up to 400,000 people in Darfur.

ETHIOPIA

Federal government seeks peace with Oromo rebels

Key figures who negotiated on behalf of the Ethiopian government last year for a permanent ceasefire with the Tigray People's Liberation Front, this week met with representatives of another of the country's rebel movements: the Oromo Liberation Army. In Zanzibar, the two sides held preliminary talks to bash out the grounds for more substantive negotiations that might end a 25-year conflict. Hundreds of people have died each year in a conflict that frequently pits Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromo, against the state.

DRC

Ghosts paid millions of dollars

Each month, the Congolese government pays a total of 145,000 people who are either fake employees or are employees with fake jobs, the ombudsman's office revealed this week, in a statement it posted on Twitter. The payments for ghost jobs and ghost public servants cost the government about \$65-million a month, and appear to be the result of an organised syndicate. The ombudsman's office says it identified 961 agents in this syndicate, some of whom hold as many as 15 government jobs.

KENYA

Quick Kelvin stuns the London Marathon

Little known until last Sunday, Kelvin Kiptum won the London Marathon in 2:01:25. That is just 16 seconds shy of the world record set by Eliud Kipchoge at the Berlin Marathon last year. But, London was only Kiptum's second world stage marathon ever. He made his debut at the Valencia Marathon last year, winning it in a time that is now the world's fastest. The 23-year-old, who is said to have self-coached until last year, is being hailed as Kipchoge 2.0.

BOTSWANA

Top global track and field athletes to thrill Gaborone

Gambia's Gina Bass and Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala will be among the many African track and field sensations to watch at the Botswana Golden Grand Prix on 29 April. They will be competing alongside other globally renowned athletes, like American sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson and Olympic champions Andre de Grasse and Kenny Bednarek. Local fans will catch the action at the National Stadium in Gaborone, with ordinary tickets going for 50 Botswana pula (about \$4).

UGANDA

Museveni wants the anti-gay bill revised

Uganda's anti-homosexuality law, which proposed criminalising people for identifying as LGBTIQ and set the death sentence and life imprisonment for some cases of same-sex intimacy, has hit a snag. After being fast-tracked through Parliament, which passed it in late March, the country's president refused to assent to it and sent it back to the legislators this week. Among his few suggested revisions, Yoweri Museveni asked the legislators to criminalise same-sex intimacy but not LGBTIQ identity. His notes for revision say nothing about the death penalty.



Sent back: Museveni raised concerns with Parliament's proposed bill.

Photo: Presidency

NAMIBIA

Another small fragment of stolen Africa returned

Finland this week handed back fragments of a sacred Namibian stone that was desecrated by two Finns in 1886. The two, a missionary and a geologist, saw a stone in northern Namibia that no one was allowed to touch but chipped at it, ostensibly because they wanted to know if it was a meteorite. The fragments eventually passed on to the National Museum of Finland and will now go to the National Museum of Namibia. Africans have yet to go to Europe and desecrate important sites out of curiosity. Not that they'd get visas.

EGYPT

Fertilisers make for more trade with African countries

Africa's third largest economy, Egypt, trades very little with other African countries – about 15% of its total trade is within Africa compared to South Africa's 26%. But that is changing, according to the country's trade minister, Samir Ahmed, who said their trade within Africa was growing. In just three months, it had already hit \$2-billion, 40% of the usual annual total trade. Much of this is Egyptian exports in construction materials and fertilisers, with the Ukraine war driving demand and prices.

GEOPOLITICS

BRIC to BRICS to Alphabet Mafia

Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, Egypt and 15 other countries want to join BRICS, according to South Africa's ambassador to the emerging markets bloc. Founded as BRIC by Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2006, it admitted South Africa in 2010 to become BRICS. The bloc is useful for countries like Russia to escape the sanctions of the United States and its Western allies. It styles itself as a way to challenge institutions like the World Bank, which were built to maintain Western domination (a system dubbed



Diplomatic letters: Other countries are vying for one of these BRICS seats.

Photo: BRICSza

the “rules-based world order” when the West isn't invading other countries). The foreign ministers of its five member states will meet in Cape Town in early June to discuss the possible expansion.

Malawi

Winter is coming

To cope with multiple crises – not all of their own making – countries like Malawi need to borrow more money. Instead, the IMF is warning of major funding cuts

Josephine Chinele

Malawi already owes \$3.9-billion to external creditors. But after a series of crises – including a cholera outbreak, a foreign exchange crisis, steep inflation and the impact of Cyclone Freddy – one of the largest storms in history – the country needs to borrow even more.

Finance Minister Sosten Gwengwe is planning to ask the International Monetary Fund for another loan, following on from the \$88.3-million that the fund lent to Malawi last year. To do so, it needs to obtain “letters of assurance” from its many existing creditors – signed documents that say that they are not worried that Malawi will default, or indicate that they are happy to restructure their loans to make payments sustainable.

Malawi currently spends 34% of its annual budget on servicing debt, according to the recently-published 2023/24 budget.

Even if Gwengwe succeeds in obtaining all of these letters, there is no guarantee that more funds will be forthcoming from the IMF, the world’s lender of last resort.

Earlier this month, IMF’s Africa Director Aemro Selassie told journalists that there might be less money to lend out. That is because inflation in rich countries is causing them to shrink their foreign aid budgets and increase borrowing costs.

Another tough year lies ahead for Malawi – and other countries in a similar position. “But instead of losing hope from the tighter financing conditions... let’s remain positive and look at such occurrences as an opportunity to build back better and stronger,” Malawi’s Treasury Secretary MacDonald Mwale told *The Continent*. ■



Bad shake: Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera meets IMF boss Kristalina Georgieva. Photo: IMF

Comoros

French operation to expel Mayotte migrants to go ahead as planned

France's Foreign Minister Gérald Darmanin has deployed a contingent of police and gendarmes to deport undocumented people from Mayotte, located off the east coast of Africa.

Kiri Rupiah

The Indian Ocean archipelago of the Comoros said on Friday that it will not accept undocumented migrants expelled from the neighbouring French island of Mayotte in a move inflaming a burgeoning diplomatic spat. Authorities in Mayotte are expected to launch Operation Wuambushu (“take back” in the local Shimaore language) next week to remove people who have settled in

informal settlements on the island.

French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin has deployed some 1,800 police and gendarmes to remove undocumented migrants, most of whom come from the neighbouring Comoros.

Of the estimated 350,000 people living on the island, only half are French nationals. In 1974, the four islands which made up the Comoros – Grande Comore, Mohéli, Anjouan and Mayotte – undertook a referendum to gain independence from France. Only Mayotte chose to stay under French rule. Grande Comore, Mohéli, Anjouan are what make up the present-day Republic of Comoros. Mayotte, where crime is rampant and around 80% of the population live beneath the poverty line, is France’s most impoverished department.

The operation was approved by French President Emmanuel Macron in February. The planned deportations, which Mayotte authorities insist are part of a crime-fighting initiative to clean up the island, were halted by a French court on Tuesday which declared that the action had no legal foundation and threatened civil liberties. Those without proper documentation are to be relocated 70km away to Anjouan, which is the closest Comorian island to Mayotte.

It is unclear where France plans to house the deported. ■

Kenya



Shallow graves: the site of exhumations at Shakahola. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

People tried to stop a deadly cult, but authorities did not listen

“Pastor Mackenzie”, the leader of the starvation cult which killed at least 90 people, was repeatedly arrested – and repeatedly released

Rael Ombuor in Nairobi

Kazungu Mvera, a human rights activist in Malindi, says it was late 2017 when she first heard of Paul Mackenzie Nthenge, the preacher who is making international headlines for

allegedly advising his followers to starve to death.

Back then, Mvera was told that “Pastor Mackenzie” was discouraging children from going to school; and that his adult followers were burning their school

certificates, in line with his teaching that education was evil. When she heard that the preacher was holding up to 100 children at his premises, she joined other residents in calling for an end to his fellowship.

She searched for his social media pages and commented on his posts to call him out. At least once, the preacher responded to call her a liar but she also got affirming responses, like the message from a woman who said her daughter was one of Mackenzie's followers and had gone missing.

"We made so much noise that the area member of parliament intervened," she remembers. The church was closed and "Pastor Mackenzie" was arrested. But the police then dropped the ball – as they would time and again thereafter. "They would arrest, and let him go, arrest and let him go," Mvera says. The community drove him out of his first base in an area called Migingo. He set up further away in Madumbuni, but that area's residents set his church on fire between 2019 and 2020.

In May 2019, "Pastor Mackenzie" had been arrested again, charged over inciting children against education. He was released by the court on a \$1,000 bond. He told journalists that he would retire from his preaching career soon after that. But when the church in Madumbuni was burnt, he instead set up in Shakahola, the forested area that is now littered with shallow mass graves from which bodies of his followers are being exhumed and piled in a refrigerated shipping container.

The Continent spoke to one of at least 16 gravediggers hired by the Kenyan

authorities, a Shakahola resident who remembers when "Pastor Mackenzie" first moved into the area. He said that, at first, the women of the fellowship used to come to the nearby town, and could be seen shopping with children. Then "they just disappeared," he recalls. He said he wanted to go into the forest and ask after them but abandoned the idea after being told that some of the preacher's followers were armed.

Still, news about his harms trickled out. In March, police learnt that two boys in the "Pastor Mackenzie" commune had died of starvation. They arrested and charged him. A judge set his bail at \$80 and "Pastor Mackenzie" walked free again.

Just weeks later, on April 13, police were tipped off that more people in the commune were starving to death. They raided the place and found more than a dozen emaciated people and what appeared to be a shallow grave.

Two weeks later, police and local gravediggers have dug out at least 90 bodies from graves in Shakahola forest. The eventual death toll is expected to exceed 100 people in what is the largest mass death linked to a cult in Kenya's recorded history.

It is a national tragedy. For Mvera, the activist who tried to fight "Pastor Mackenzie" back in 2017, it is also personal. Her cousin joined the cult, and is still missing. Among the dead are her cousin's five-year-old and one-year-old sons. Only her eldest, an emaciated 8-year-old boy, was rescued.

"This could have been prevented," said the gravedigger. ■

Uganda

The long shadow of Kibwetere's Kanungu cult

He survived a religious mass murder 23 years ago. But the emotional scars remain.

Andrew Arinaitwe

As a little boy, Ahimbisibwe Peter wandered away from a religious commune to look for food. That saved him from an inferno which killed 700 Ugandans on 17 March 2000 in Kanungu, some 420km west of Uganda's capital Kampala.

The followers of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, led by Joseph Kibwetere, a school teacher turned politician, were locked up in their church before it was set ablaze. Ahimbisibwe's mother, Maria Gorret Kenoheri, two of his sisters, Sylvia and Fortunate, and four other relatives were among the hundreds who burnt to death or suffocated in the fire.

Twenty-three years later, Ahimbisibwe says he is still still afraid of the grounds

where it happened. He recounts that he once walked there for an interview with a foreign film crew but his trauma response to the grounds was so strong, it was physical: "After the interview my legs got really swollen."

Ahimbisibwe's father, Peter Kurunerieyo Banagaho, who never joined the movement, was frequently hired to dig pits on its grounds. He was told they were latrines but noticed that they quickly got filled in. Today, he is haunted by the suspicion that the pits were used as mass graves for killings that happened in the months leading to church burning.

Godfrey Karabenda, Kanungu's current mayor, says that in the late 1990s, Kibwetere the politician teamed up with a dejected priest, Dominic Katabibabo, to start the movement. They later convinced a local brewer, Credonia Mwerinde, to give them her father's land for their church. Once she agreed, they discovered it could be a business model.

"They started to persuade their followers to start selling their property. 'Sell whatever you have, come and follow Jesus because very soon in the year 2000 the world shall come to an end!' They took the message to Rwanda, Burundi, the Kingdom of Toro," Karabenda recalls.

Burning the church was the exit strategy once believers caught on, since the world did not in fact end with the start of the year 2000. ■

Health

Ghana and Nigeria approve Oxford malaria vaccine

A new malaria vaccine seems much more effective than the one which made history as the world's first in 2021. The question is whether African governments can afford to roll it out to those most at risk

Kiri Rupiah

Ghana and Nigeria became the first countries to approve a new malaria vaccine developed by the University of Oxford. Although results from its last stage clinical trial have not yet been reported, the R21 vaccine promises to be a lot more potent than Mosquirix, an earlier vaccine by British drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) greenlit in 2021.

Last September, R21 researchers reported that it continued to exceed the WHO's vaccine efficacy standard. The vaccine's efficacy was 80% if a booster was given to children in the right dose after a year of the initial dose. That is a big improvement on Mosquirix, which the global health body approved after pilot schemes in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. It showed that it was 30% effective at reducing cases of severe malaria. Mosquirix, which took 30 years

to develop, was not only the first malaria vaccine, but also the first vaccine for any parasitic disease.

Malaria is one of the world's deadliest infectious diseases, killing close to half a million people every year. Around 94% of malaria cases and deaths occur on the African continent.

In 2019, over 380,000 Africans died from the disease and the WHO says that 274,000 were children under five. Both R21 and Mosquirix are given to children under three years of age.

The challenge now is to get financing for production and distribution of the more effective vaccine to all the African children who need it. Mosquirix is being rolled out in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi with funding from Gavi and the Vaccine Alliance. India's Serum Institute says it can manufacture 200-million doses of R21 every year, but Ghana and Nigeria's governments will now have to find the money to place the orders and get those shots into tiny arms. ■

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PHOTO ESSAY

A nation in despair

Two generals, each with a long history of human rights abuses, are fighting for the leadership of Sudan. The war struck suddenly and with great violence. At least 500 people have been killed in fighting across the country, while tens of thousands have been displaced, with both figures likely to rise. Among those forced from their homes are correspondents for The Continent, who are having to find ways to protect themselves and their families. They have stories to tell, but for now they are focusing on more immediate priorities.



This picture, taken on 16 April, shows Sudanese army soldiers loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan posing for a picture at the Rapid Support Forces base in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan. Battling fighters in Sudan said they had agreed to an hours-long humanitarian pause, allowing the wounded to be evacuated, on the second day of raging urban battles that killed more than 50 civilians – including three United Nations staff, sparking international outcry. Photo: AFP via Getty Images



People flee their neighbourhoods amid fighting between the army and paramilitaries in Khartoum on 19 April, following the collapse of a 24-hour truce.

Photo: AFP via Getty Images



A video grab taken from AFPTV video footage on 19 April, showing the black smoke covering the sky above Khartoum. Explosions and gunfire resounded in Sudan's capital on 20 April, as fighting between the forces of two rival generals showed no signs of abating ahead of festivities marking the end of Ramadan.

Photo: Abdelmoneim Sayed/AFP



People fleeing street battles between the forces of two rival Sudanese generals are transported on the back of a truck in the southern part of Khartoum on 21 April. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands wounded since the fighting erupted on 15 April. The death toll is expected to be much higher.

Photo: AFP via Getty Images



People prepare to board a bus departing from Khartoum in the Sudanese capital's south on 24 April as battles rage in the city between the army and paramilitaries.

Photo: AFP via Getty Images



Greek nationals from Sudan arrive with a military C-27 plane at the military airport of Elefsina, south of Athens, on 25 April. Foreigners have been evacuated while locals die. Photo: Aris Messinis/AFP via Getty Images



Internationally-recruited personnel of the United Nations Mission board the French frigate Lorraine as they evacuate from Port Sudan on 26 April during a United States-brokered ceasefire between the country's warring generals. Photo: AFP via Getty Images

Africa



Accused: Fortune Charumbira has been charged with sexual assault

‘Just kiss me’

The most senior lawmaker on the African continent has been charged with sexual assault. This is the latest in a string of alleged sexual offences implicating African Union leaders

Stephen Tsoroti and Simon Allison

The president of the Pan-African Parliament, Fortune Charumbira, has been charged with sexual assault by police in Zimbabwe’s Masvingo province.

According to the docket, Charumbira

is accused of sexually assaulting his 27-year-old niece on two separate occasions this year.

On 31 March, he is alleged to have invited her to a suite at a luxury hotel in Harare, where he put his hands under her dress, touched her breasts and kissed her

without her consent.

On 2 April, after requesting a meeting to discuss the previous incident, 61-year-old Charumbira is alleged to have put his hand between her legs and touched her genitals, while demanding that she kiss him.

In a 16-minute long audio recording, recorded by the complainant on her phone, Charumbira is heard to say: “I see more value and benefit in you and we being linked somehow, being friends, being very close friends, private, very close friends ... just a kiss with me.”

Later in the recording, he says: “Kiss me to motivate me.”

Charumbira has denied the allegations. “There is no element of truth in those allegations,” he told Zimbabwe’s *NewsDay* newspaper.

NewsDay reported that it had seen a leaked WhatsApp conversation between Charumbira and the complainant’s father, in which he said he regretted the incident and asked him not to share the audio file.

Charumbira did not respond to questions from *The Continent*. Neither did the Pan-African Parliament. He has indicated elsewhere that he does not intend to step down from his position while the case is being investigated.

Predatory presidents

Charumbira is a prominent player in Zimbabwean and continental politics. As the leader of the Nemanwa Chieftainship in Masvingo province, he has led Zimbabwe’s Council of Chiefs since 2013. He is a prominent supporter of the ruling Zanu-PF. Last year, he succeeded

Cameroon’s Roger Nkodo Dang as president of the Pan-African Parliament, the African Union’s legislative arm.

Dang’s seven-year tenure at the AU was also tainted by scandal. In May 2019, parliamentary staff went on strike, accusing him of nepotism, favouritism, bullying and sexual harassment. A parliamentary investigation – the results of which were leaked to the South African *Mail & Guardian* newspaper – found that he was guilty of improper behaviour including unwelcome touching, making unwanted advances, suggestive conversations and scheduling meetings at inappropriate times and venues.

Dang disputed these findings as “allegations without proof”.

In May 2019, parliamentary staff went on strike, accusing Dang of nepotism, favouritism, bullying and sexual harassment

The inquiry recommended that the African Union launch a full investigation. Instead, the Pan-African Parliament voted in secret to bury the findings, and to take no action against Dang, who kept his job. He left the position in 2022 with full benefits and honours.

Institutional impunity

Gender equality is a central pillar of the African Union’s “Agenda 2063”, a roadmap for the continent’s growth and development. Yet the continental body’s response to sexual harassment and gender



No consequences:
Despite the damning findings of an internal investigation, Roger Nkodo Dang completed his term as PAP president. Photo: Lionel Bonaventure/AFP

discrimination within its own ranks has been to cover it up – both at the Pan-African Parliament and within the African Union Commission itself.

In 2018, 37 female staffers wrote an open letter to commission chair Mousa Faki Mahamat, complaining of a ‘gender apartheid’ within the institution, including pervasive sexual harassment and gender discrimination. No action was taken until the publication of a *Mail & Guardian* investigation into the matter.

This report prompted an internal inquiry, led by Bineta Diop, who was then the AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security. After interviewing 88 staffers, the inquiry reached a damning conclusion: it found at least 44 cases of alleged unfair labour practises, sexual harassment, sexual assault, fraud and nepotism. It said that

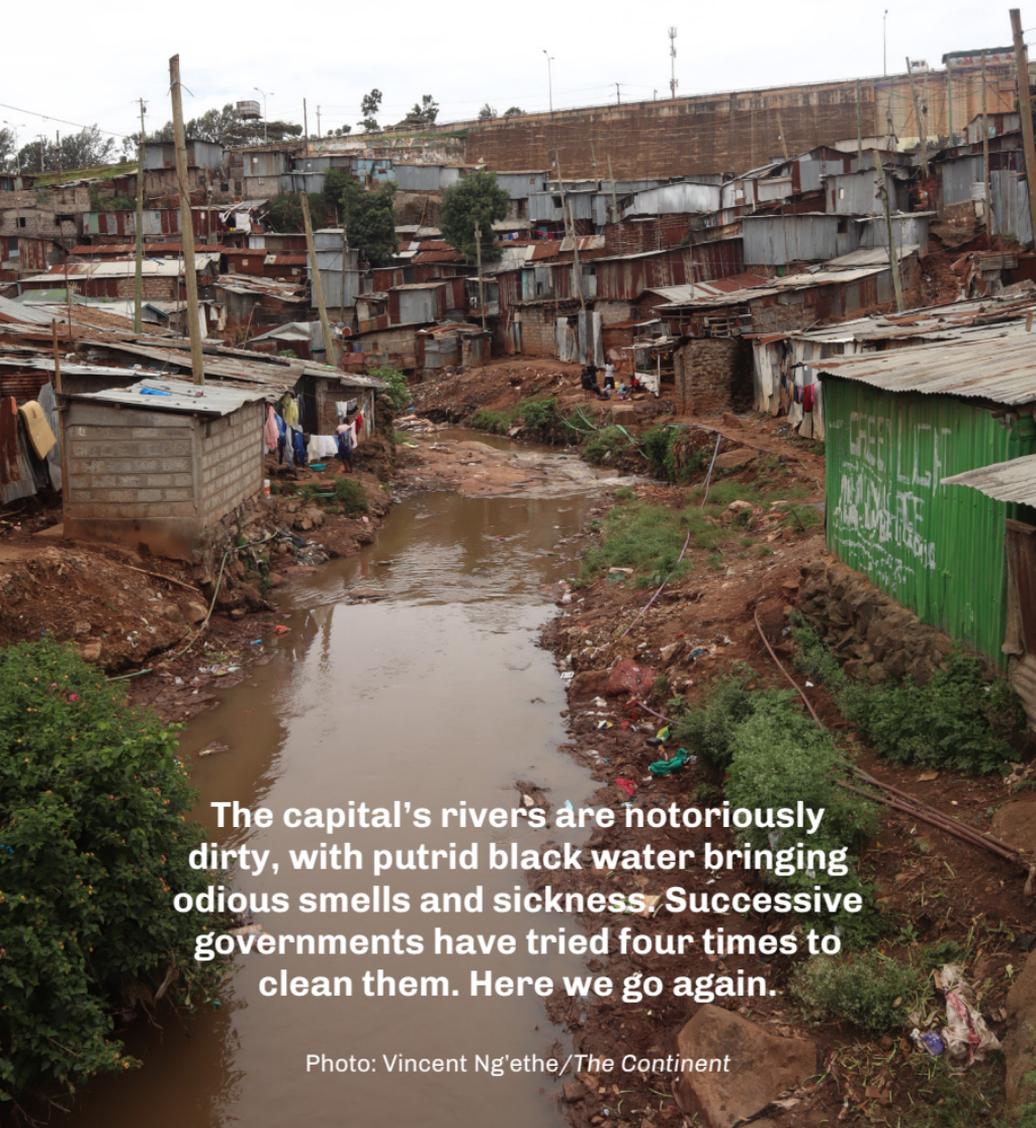
staffers confirmed “almost unanimously” that sexual harassment and assault occurred, including “young women [who] are exploited for sex in exchange for jobs”.

Only a small excerpt of the report was ever made public. The alleged perpetrators were never publicly named. An abridged version, leaked again to the *Mail & Guardian*, implicated the powerful Peace and Security Commissioner Smail Chergui, although his alleged offence was not specified.

No action was taken against Chergui. The Algerian completed his term and left office in 2021 with full benefits and honours. Other alleged perpetrators have retained their positions.

Commission chair Faki declined to respond to questions sent by *The Continent*. ■

A grand plan to clean Nairobi's rivers – for the fifth time (and counting)



The capital's rivers are notoriously dirty, with putrid black water bringing odious smells and sickness. Successive governments have tried four times to clean them. Here we go again.

Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe/The Continent

Vincent Ng'ethe in Nairobi

Korogocho is a slum about nine kilometres northeast of Nairobi's central business district. It neighbours the city's garbage dumps. The Nairobi River snakes its way through the area and its 40,000 residents, according to the 2019 census. It brings floods, pollution and politicians promising easy fixes. It also gives people a green space.

That's thanks to community groups like Komb Green.

"Our dream is for the river to be clean," says Faries Kahuha, one of the group's officials. When *The Continent* visits in early April, the river is swollen from recent rains and the water is dark – a sign of pollution.

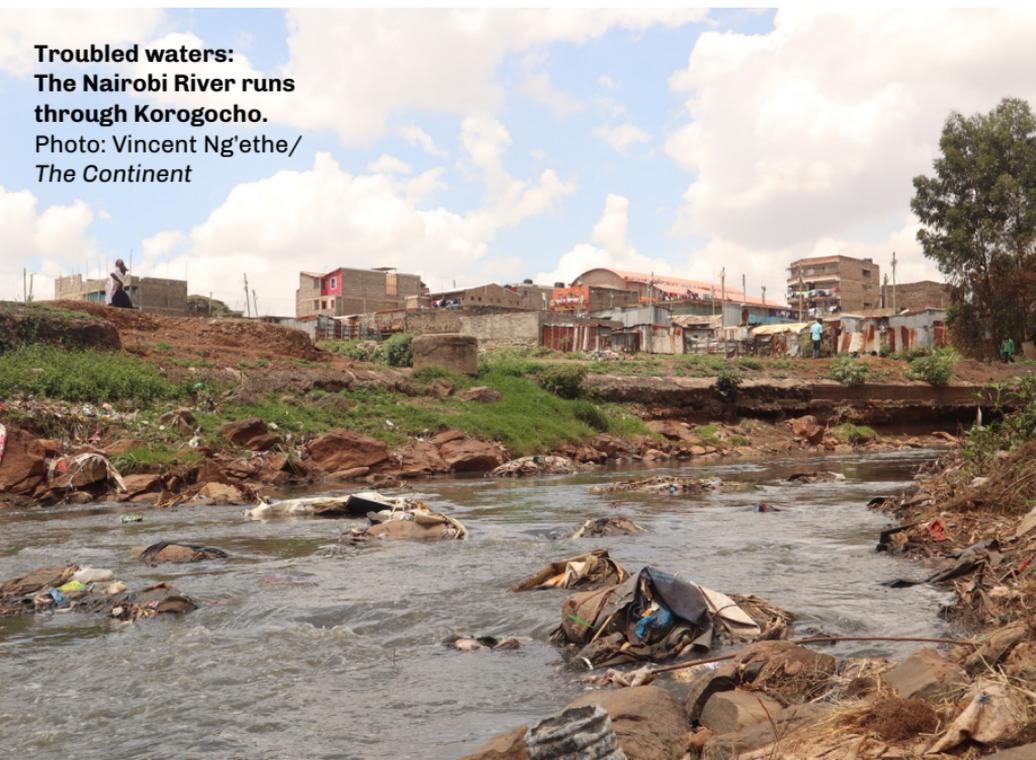
Kahuha talks through the regular attempts to clean up this part of the river, one of Nairobi's three major rivers. The Ngong and the Mathare are the other two. Since he was a child, he's seen people paid to pull waste out of the river, only to dump it all on the river bank.

Through community volunteers and their own work, Komb Green has helped to create a park along the river — dubbed "people's park" because it was driven by locals. Opened five years ago, it's now a safe space for children to play, and for women to sit in safety.

President William Ruto used the park to launch the Nairobi Rivers Commission in February. He called the river "discoloured, smelly, often corrosive and toxic." Kahuha says though they didn't get

Troubled waters: The Nairobi River runs through Korogocho.

Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe/
The Continent





Pollution in Nairobi's rivers is far higher than recommended limits.

Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe/*The Continent*

to meet the president, they're still waiting for the words to turn into action. "We're patient," he adds.

Dr Damaris Mbui, an environmental chemist at the University of Nairobi, says studies show local rivers have pollution levels that are far above the safe limits allowed by the World Health Organisation.

Calvin Okoth, who also works at Komb Green, says industries pollute with little consequence. "You can watch the water suddenly go black. But we don't have the resources to take on these companies – they can fight and we just have our voices."

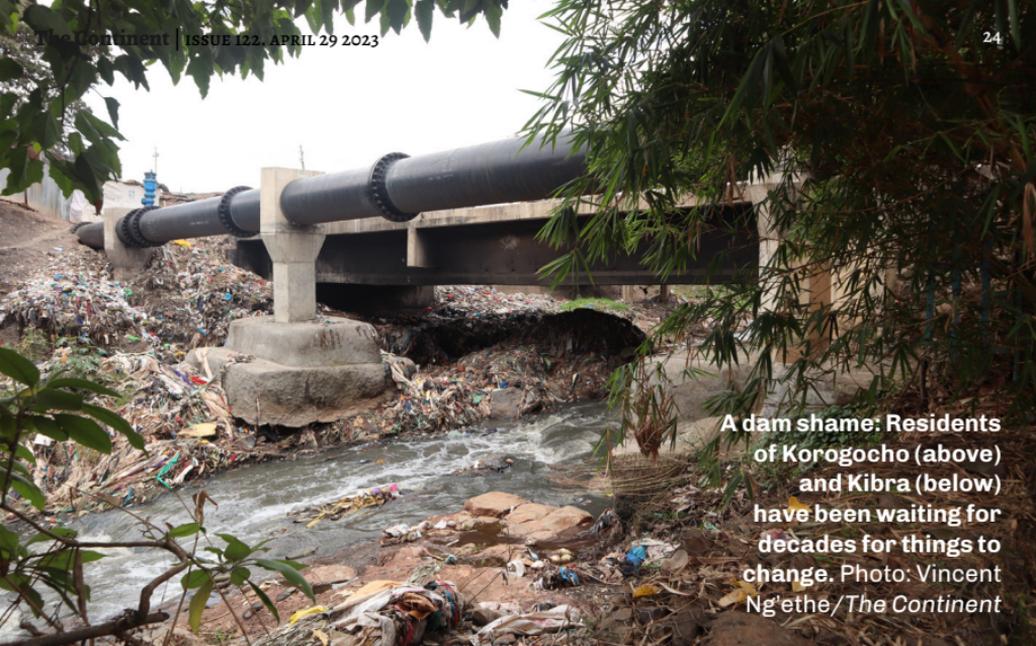
The National Environmental Management Authority has increased enforcement on polluters since 2019. Now it will have to work with many other stakeholders on the commission if this cleanup is to succeed.

Government clean-ups have come and gone since 1999, when Kenya passed the Environmental Management Act. As home to the global offices of the UN's Environment Programme, the country needed Nairobi to look better. It partnered with the UN on a project to clean up the whole Nairobi River basin.

But subsequent plans saw people living along the river as the problem. They are blamed for polluting rivers, in part because they do not have proper sewerage systems and toilets drain into rivers. A 2018 report by Kenya's auditor-general said there were plenty of big sewerage lines and they were not being connected to neighbourhoods, leaving people without a way to dispose of waste.

The state has previously proposed resettlement as part of the solution and a 2008 plan would have meant 127,000 people being moved. That plan appears not to have gone ahead, after human rights organisations argued that there was no clear plan for their resettlement, or compensation.

The Nairobi Rivers Commission tells *The Continent* that it is "engaging stakeholders" on a long-term strategy for stopping pollution, and managing waste, with communities at the centre. On the issue of moving people, it says it wants to promote migration to rural areas with the counties, and "enterprises that engage



A dam shame: Residents of Korogocho (above) and Kibra (below) have been waiting for things to change. Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe/The Continent



communities in food security and wealth creation”.

At the commission’s launch, President Ruto offered a carrot. To loud cheers, he said people would pay \$22 a month for a

new home that they would then own after 15 years. The stick had come during the Covid-19 lockdown, when 5,000 families in a nearby district were evicted to make way for a sewerage treatment plant. ■

The Sudan that could be

This month, as rival generals plunged the country into civil war, images from Sudan have dominated international news broadcasts (and even the news pages of this newspaper).

Don't let these define Sudan. Instead, view the country from the perspective of the brilliant filmmakers and artists who call it home. **Wilfred Okiche** picks five films from five Sudanese directors that tell a different story.



Tajouje (1977)

Sudanese cinema owes plenty to Gadalla Gubara, the producer, director and photographer whose legacy as the pioneer of the national cinema remains unchallenged. Gubara famously made films well into his twilight years. *Tajouje* is often considered his magnum opus, a sprawling epic romance centering a tragic love triangle involving the titular heroine and two of her suitors. Even though *Tajouje* was digitally restored in 2017, it remains frustratingly hard to access.

Beats of the Antonov (2014)

Director Hajooj Kuka's rousing documentary documents conflict in the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains regions, focusing on the role of music in helping the affected communities sustain themselves culturally and spiritually in the face of conflict. While government forces use converted Antonov cargo planes to bomb their communities, residents gather and use their voices and instruments as tools against the violence. It premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival.





Goodbye Julia (2023)

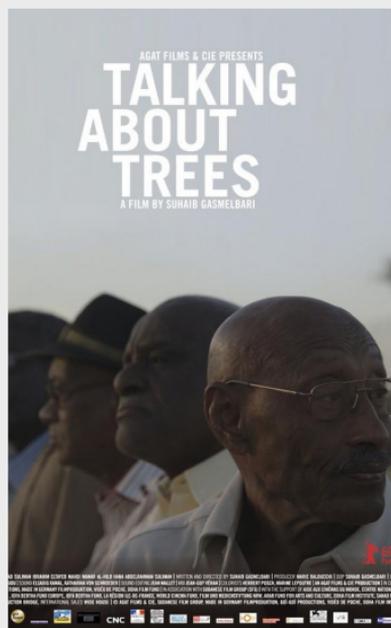
When Mohamed Kordofani's debut feature premieres at the Cannes Film Festival this May in the Un Certain Regard section, it will mark the first time in history that a Sudanese film is named to the festival's official selection. *Goodbye Julia* is set in Khartoum against the backdrop of the birth of events leading to the newly independent country South Sudan. This drama explores the differences between the two countries through the relationship of two people. Kordofani considers the film "a call for reconciliation".

Khartoum Offside (2019)

Khartoum Offside follows young women and their charismatic coach looking to play professional football, in defiance of a ban imposed by the Islamist military government. Staring down myriad challenges, they're determined to get official recognition as the Sudanese women's national football team. Director Marwa Zein made the documentary despite opposition from some government quarters.

Talking About Trees (2019)

A delightful charmer, *Talking About Trees* finds an uplifting story in the most unusual of places. Director Suhaib Gasmelbari follows the efforts of four retired Sudanese filmmakers – Ibrahim Shadad, Manar Al Hilo, Suleiman Mohamed Ibrahim and Altayeb Mahdi – as they attempt to reopen an outdoor cinema in the city of Omdurman. What are they up against? Decades of political censorship, apathy and government bureaucracy. *Talking About Trees* is a refreshing celebration of bonds and a reminder that cinema will always be communal fellowship.



Support for free media on the rise

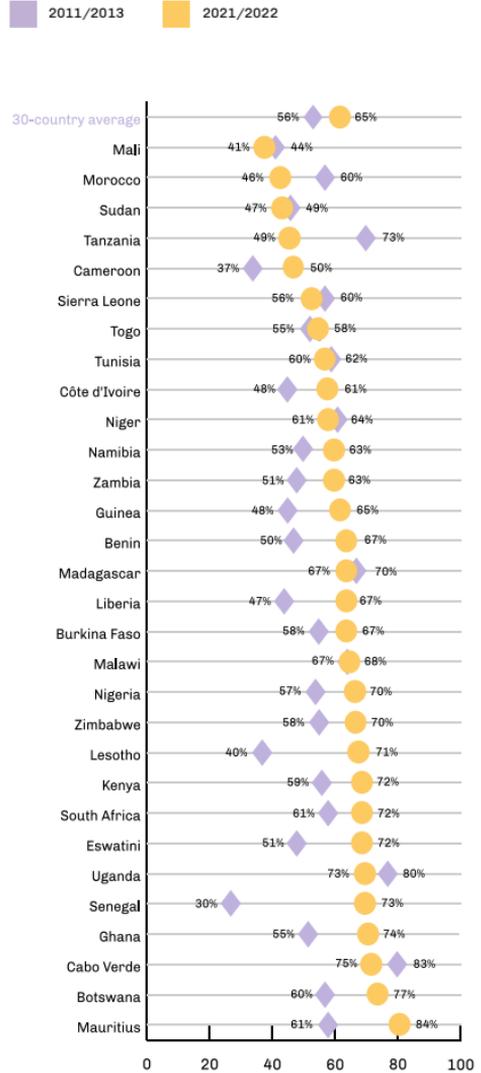
In observance of the 30th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day (3 May), let's take a quick look back – though not quite 30 years – to see how far we've come.

On average across 30 African countries surveyed in both 2011/2013 and 2021/2022, support for media freedom has gained 9 percentage points, rising from 56% to 65% of citizens who say the media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control. Fewer than half as many (32%) think the government should have the right to prevent publications it considers harmful to society.

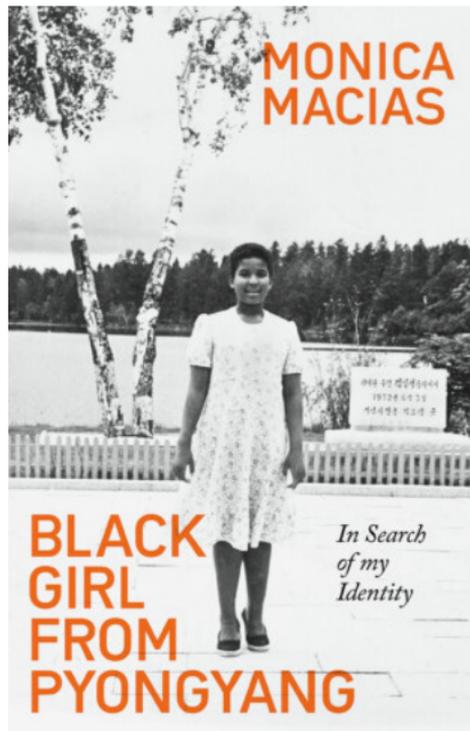
Twenty of the 30 countries recorded significant gains over the past decade. The most dramatic change was in Senegal, where support for a free media more than doubled (from 30% to 73%), followed by Lesotho (+31 percentage points), Mauritius (+23 points), Eswatini (+21 points), and Liberia (+20 points).

Five countries saw declines of more than 3 percentage points, led by Tanzania (-24 points) and Morocco (-14 points). These drops place Tanzania (49%) and Morocco (46%) among the four countries where fewer than half of citizens insist on a free media, joined by Mali (41%) and Sudan (47%).

Support for media freedom | 30 African countries | 2011-2022



Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.



The dictator's daughter who grew up in North Korea

Pyongyang is a long way from Malabo.

Jacqueline Nyathi

Mónica Macías is the youngest child of Equatorial Guinea's first

president, who was deposed in 1979 and later executed by firing squad. Upon his death, the seven-year-old Macías and her siblings were sent to live with her father's old friend: North Korea's "Supreme Leader" Kim Il-Sung.

There, she was educated (or indoctrinated) at a military boarding school just outside Pyongyang, leaving the country only after completing university. She spoke Spanish as a child but lost her language and culture as she grew up.

This book is the story of her life from her earliest childhood memories, through her years in North Korea, her leaving, and later, as she made her way as a woman with a complicated identity. Her decision to leave was driven by her desire to see the outside world, to connect to her past and to find out whether her father really was a cruel dictator.

She promises to outline evidence that her father was not as bad as he was portrayed to be but doesn't, instead talking briefly about how people around him killed innocent people in his name.

Black Girl from Pyongyang: In Search of My Identity is fascinating on the level of the uniqueness of Macías's perspective, with wonderful biographical details. It was delightful to read about her childhood, and I could empathise with her painful circumstances. However, Macías's frequent declamations and the solutions she advances for fixing the world, when she stands on her soapbox, are less interesting. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

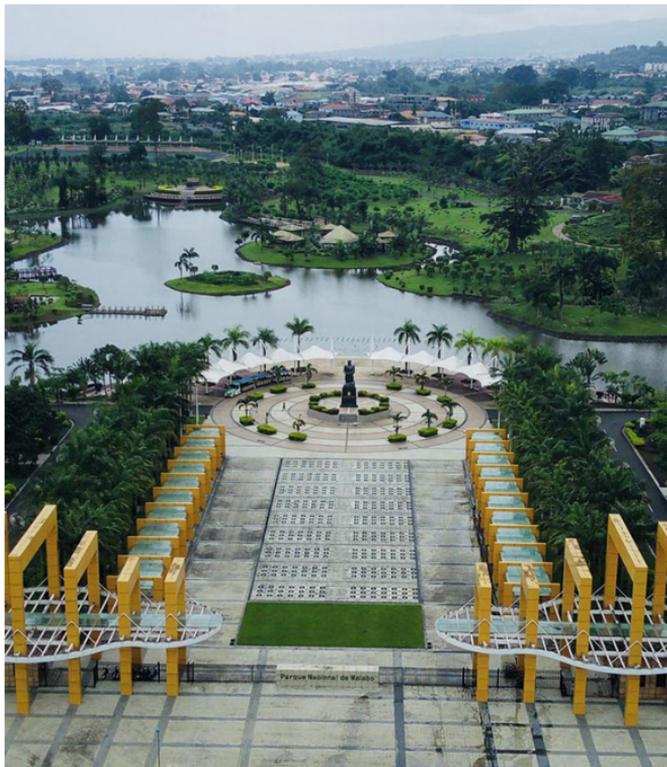
"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

4-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

"I basically am the AU headquarters (minus the sex scandals)."



- 1_ What is the capital city (pictured) of Equatorial Guinea?
- 2_ In which country is the African Union headquartered?
- 3_ True or false: Burundi is part of the BRICS bloc.
- 4_ Siya Kolisi is the captain of which country's national men's rugby team?
- 5_ Who was the president of Sudan from 1993 to 2019?
- 6_ Kreol Seselwa is spoken in which country?
- 7_ Which country was once called "Mdree-Bahree" meaning "land of the sea"?
- 8_ English footballer Bukayo Saka was born to parents from which country?
- 9_ Colonel Assimi Goïta is which country's interim president?
- 10_ Francisco Macías Nguema was the first president of which country?

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

South Africa needs its Constitutional Court to play a political role

The court is under unprecedented attack from the ruling party, and we need to defend its reach into politics

Terique Carim

Placing constraints on politicians enhances democracy. In South Africa, a key actor in this is the Constitutional Court – the highest judicial body. It acts as a bulwark, balancing rights, concern and respect. The court exemplified this by directing Parliament to afford same-sex couples a right to marry in 2005 – extending the right despite popular opposition.

That judicial power is a hallmark of post-1994 South Africa. During apartheid, the legislative and executive wielded unconstrained powers. The ruling ANC is trying to unpick that power.

Allowing that would be a step backwards, and we simply cannot trust

the unfettered power that it would give politicians. It is true that democracy brought with it a newly minted respect for rights. But discarding judicial restraints on this basis is, to borrow Justice Ginsburg's words, "like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet".

Opponents of judicial review point to the unfairness of permitting unelected judges to overrule elected representatives.

But political rights and civil liberties can erode, perhaps inadvertently, at the hands of even reasonable elected representatives; legislatures are arenas of compromise. And a functional court is the only way to ensure against this.

Access to courts is also an important way to foment social justice. Minority groups are guaranteed a hearing for issues often omitted in legislative discussions. This is a form of political participation – particularly in South Africa where society has been mobilised through court cases.

The court has been criticised for stepping into the realm of politics. But failing to engage on such issues would have had concrete political outcomes, and hence have been a political decision – as well as an abdication of responsibility. ■

Terique Carim is a law student at the University of the Witwatersrand. This piece is a summary of the essay that won the inaugural African Democracy



Essay Prize run by the Centre for Research on Democracy at Stellenbosch University. It is produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.

THE BIG PICTURE

Taking the high road: Muslim worshippers take a motorbike taxi to go to the beach for the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, in Malindi, Kenya on 23 April 2023.

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty



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