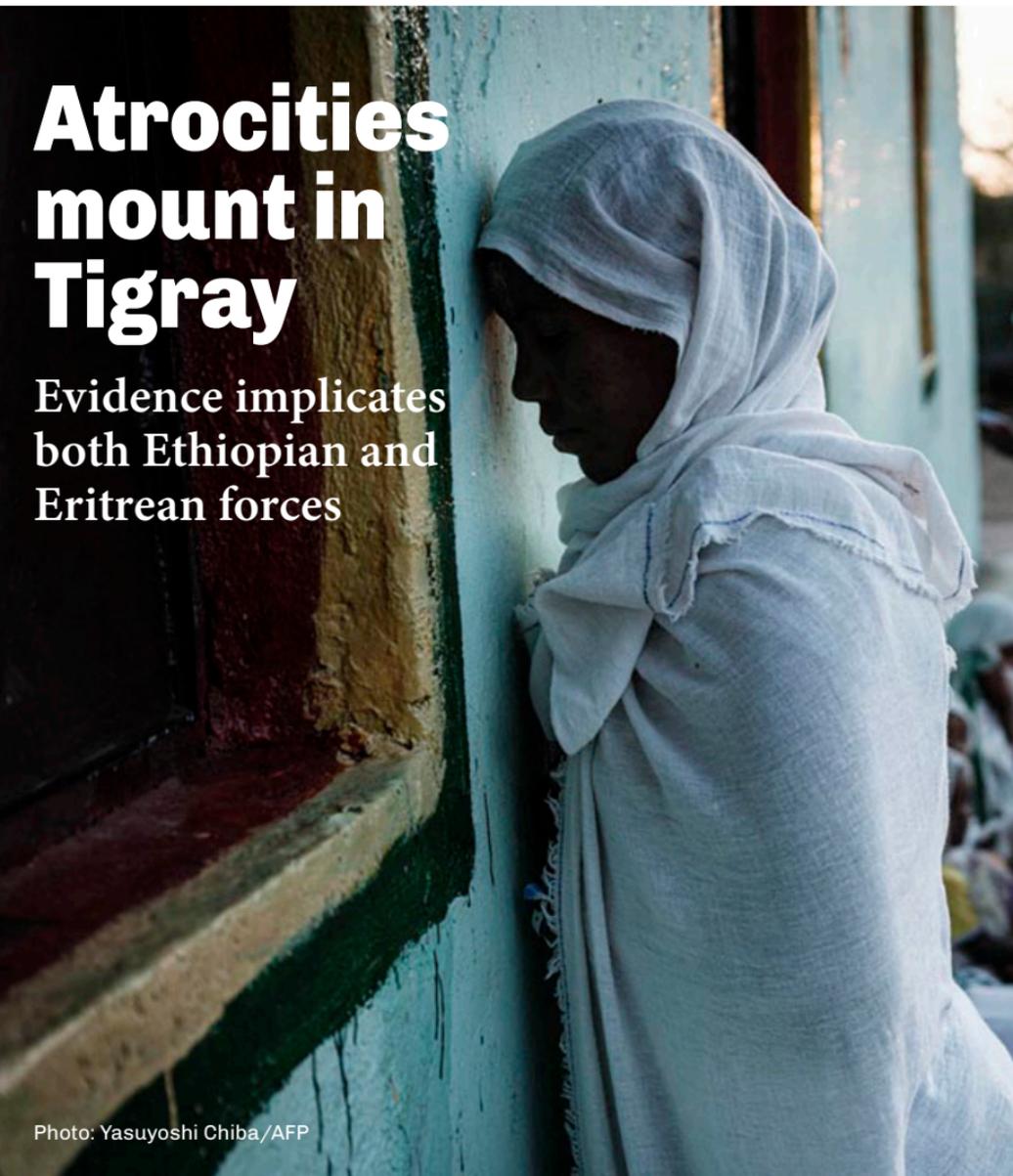


# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian

## Atrocities mount in Tigray

Evidence implicates  
both Ethiopian and  
Eritrean forces





**COVER STORY:** Covering the war in Ethiopia has been a challenge since it began in November. The national government in Addis Ababa cut off internet and other communication lines, making it difficult for journalists, human rights organisations and Tigrayan residents to document the war for the outside world. But with refugees making their way to neighbouring Sudan and the Ethiopian government lifting some restrictions, cracks in the firewall have revealed overwhelming evidence of massacres and human rights violations across parts of Tigray, which may amount to war crimes. (Our special focus on this begins on p17)

# Inside:

- **How to rig an election:** The Uganda edition (p5)
- **Travel:** Welcome to Bulawayo! (p14)
- **Quiz:** So, how pan-African are you really? (p24)
- **Feature:** Meet Malawi's richest bodyguard (p25)
- **Analysis:** Don't let the government seize Zambia's digital space, writes Hakainde Hichilema (p30)



## AN EXPERIMENT IN GRAPHIC JOURNALISM

For the first time, *The Continent* is running a news story in illustrated form. Check out Leanne de Bassompierre's feature (p9) on the prisoner who is running for parliament in Côte d'Ivoire, alongside Roland Polman's evocative images (p11)

# The Week in Numbers

## 20

The number of migrants who died on Wednesday after being thrown into the sea by smugglers in a bid to reduce the number of people on their 200-person boat, between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. According to the UN's International Organization for Migration, the boat was travelling from Djibouti to Yemen, a common route for migrants seeking work in the wealthy Gulf states.

## 12

The number of African countries that shut down the internet in 2020. Algeria, Burundi, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda all ordered partial or total internet blackouts, mostly to stifle dissent, according to Access Now, a digital rights advocacy group.



## 3.94-million

The number of AstraZeneca vaccine doses received by Nigeria this week under the Covax alliance, the most for any nation signed up to the scheme so far. The country has begun an online registration campaign ahead of the vaccine rollout that will prioritise healthcare and other frontline workers.

## 85th

Nigeria's position on a list of internet affordability by Surfshark, a virtual private network service provider. The company surveyed 85 countries to determine how much time people would need to work to afford the cheapest mobile data plan in their countries, and found Nigerians

have to work for 27 minutes and 55 seconds to afford 1GB of mobile data, compared with a global average of 10 minutes. It would take Nigerians 33 hours and 42 minutes of work to afford the cheapest broadband plan, compared with the global average of a mere 48 minutes.

# FIGHT FAKE NEWS WITH REAL NEWS.

Disinformation is often shared on closed networks like WhatsApp. That's why *The Continent* exists. Help us fight fake news by subscribing to high quality journalism, and share that instead.



Get your copy delivered to your phone or inbox every Saturday. And if you like what you read, forward it to your friends, family and colleagues – not indiscriminately, but only with people who might appreciate it.



## HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

**Email:** [TheContinent@mg.co.za](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za) with 'SUBSCRIBE' in the subject box

**WhatsApp/Signal:** Save +27 73 805 6068 on your phone, and send us a message saying 'NEWS'

Share real news.

**The Continent**  
with MailGuardian

# Uganda

## Something doesn't add up

In an embarrassing blunder, Uganda's electoral commission has released a 'genuine' results form that appears to prove electoral fraud

**UGANDA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, 2021**  
DECLARATION OF RESULTS  
(Presidential Elections Act, No. 16, 2005, as amended, Section 51) 09051

District: **NEBBI** Code: **033**  
Constituency: **PADERRE COUNTY** Code: **103**  
Sub County/Town/Municipal Division: **NEBBI** Code: **004**  
Parish/Ward: **OMYER** Code: **053**  
Polling Station: **ANYANG** Code: **01**

Name of Candidates Contesting	Political Party / Independent	Number of valid votes polled per candidate	
		In Figures	In Words
AMBIAT ODI PATRICK	FGC	06	SIX
KABULETA KIZA JOSEPH	INDEPENDENT	—	ZERO
KALEMBA NANCY LINDA	INDEPENDENT	07	SEVEN
KATUMBA JOHN	INDEPENDENT	—	ZERO
KYAGULANYI SSENTAMU ROBERT	IND	8	EIGHT
MAO ROBERT	INDEPENDENT	—	ZERO
MATYAMBALA W	INDEPENDENT	—	ZERO
MUGISHA MURTI GABRIEL	ANT	04	FOUR
MWESIGYE FRID	INDEPENDENT	04	FOUR
TIHUKUNDE HENRY KAKURONG	INDEPENDENT	02	TWO
YOWERI MUGISHA TIHUKUNDE KAGATA	IND	84	EIGHTY FOUR
Total Number of Valid Votes Cast for Candidates		300	THREE HUNDRED
Total Number of Rejected (Invalid) votes		—	ZERO
Total Number of Ballot Papers Counted		323	THREE HUNDRED TWENTY THREE
Total Number of Spoilt Ballot Papers		—	ZERO
Total Number of Ballot Papers Issued to Polling Station		650	SIX HUNDRED FIFTY
Total Number of Unused Ballot Papers		327	THREE HUNDRED TWENTY SEVEN

Note: The Presiding Officer should ensure that ALL information is duly filled and signed.  
Total Number of Females who voted: 153  
Total Number of Males who voted: 147

### Inexplicable inconsistency

Look at the other single digit votes. They are written out as '06', '07', etc. But it's different for Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert, aka Bobi Wine.

### Suspicious sums

If you add up all the votes on this form, the total votes cast come to just 224. It is only if Bobi Wine received 84 votes, rather than 8, that you get a total of 300.

opposition candidate Bobi Wine, who claims the election was rigged in favour of incumbent President Yoweri Museveni.

Nic Cheeseman agrees. He is the author of *How To Rig An Election*, and first spotted the inconsistencies.

"The doctored form is evidence that the election results are flawed," Cheeseman told *The Continent*. "The figures were deliberately manipulated to make it look like Bobi Wine got less votes than he did."

The electoral commission has promised to investigate. ■

**O**n Monday, the Uganda Electoral Commission told citizens to beware of doctored voting results forms that are apparently floating around social media. To help distinguish between real and fake, it released an example of a "genuine" form from the January general election, for Anyang Polling Station in Nebbi District.

But the numbers on the genuine form appear to show that votes were stolen from

---

# Zimbabwe

---

## Mohadi's magic hanky no match for hanky panky

Kudzai Mashininga

**I**n November 2016, Kembo Mohadi visited the self-proclaimed prophet Shepherd Bushiri, at Bushiri's church in South Africa. At the time, Mohadi was Zimbabwe's state security minister, but his prospects looked bleak: he appeared to be on the wrong side of the bitter race to succeed then-president Robert Mugabe.

But Bushiri had a reassuring message. The religious leader told Mohadi that he would be promoted, and would shortly be wearing a "crown". He gave Mohadi a white handkerchief, and assured him that the piece of cloth would open new avenues, and provide protection.

The prophecy was soon fulfilled. Mugabe was toppled by a coup in November 2017. The new president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, appointed Mohadi as one of two vice-presidents. Unlike the other vice-president, Constantine Chiwenga, Mohadi had no political base of his own; what he offered

instead was unconditional loyalty to Mnangagwa, along with his record as a liberation war hero.

But the white handkerchief appears to have lost its powers in the intervening years. Not only has Bushiri himself fallen from grace, after being charged with multiple counts of corruption; but this week Vice-President Mohadi was forced to resign in disgrace following the allegation that he was conducting not one but two extramarital affairs while in office.

The allegations were published by online media house *ZimLive*, and were supported by leaked voice recordings between the vice-president and one of his alleged lovers.

In his resignation letter, Mohadi maintained his innocence. "I am a victim of information distortion, voice cloning and sponsored spooking and political sabotage. Digital media, in their hybridity, have been abused by my enemies to blackmail me, but my spirit will never die," he wrote, adding that he would seek legal recourse.

*ZimLive* editor Mduduzi Mathuthu stands by his story, and the authenticity of the recordings. "It will become clear that his claims of a political conspiracy by his enemies are just that – hot air," he told *The Continent*.

President Mnangagwa has yet to appoint a replacement. ■

# Senegal

Photo: John Wessels/AFP



## Sonko arrest sets opposition and police on collision course

**T**he case has transfixed the nation: Ousmane Sonko, the Senegalese opposition leader who finished third in the 2019 presidential election, stands accused of rape by an employee at a massage salon that he frequented.

The 46-year-old politician denies the charges, saying they are politically motivated, and his supporters agree.

On Wednesday, as Sonko's motorcade made its way to court in Dakar, he was surrounded by hundreds of people singing and hooting horns in solidarity. But he

never made it to the court. Some of his supporters threw stones at security forces, who responded with tear gas; shortly afterwards, Sonko was arrested again, for "disturbing public order and participating in an unauthorised demonstration".

His arrest sparked further clashes – some of the most serious unrest seen in the capital in years, and on Friday authorities began restricting access to internet and social media, leaving Senegal looking increasingly fragile for a country known for its political stability. ■

# France

## Ex-president Sarkozy wins prison time for 'corrupt pact'

**F**ormer French president Nicolas Sarkozy was this week sentenced to three years in prison — two of them suspended — in a corruption case that saw him convicted of influence peddling. Sarkozy, who was France's president from 2007 to 2012, called the ruling "profoundly and shockingly unjust" and has vowed to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg if he loses an appeal.

The conviction centred around Sarkozy's efforts to influence a different corruption investigation by offering a plum job to Gilbert Azibert, a senior magistrate on France's highest court. This was described by the judge as a "corruption pact" between Sarkozy, Gilbert and Sarkozy's lawyer, Thierry Herzog, who each received the same sentence as the former president.

Sarkozy's conviction complicates his reported desire to run for president in next year's elections. The one-term former president remains a darling among France's conservative Les Républicains



(Photo: Chesnot/ Getty Images)

(LR) party but has been plagued by scandals since leaving office in 2012.

The investigation was based on wiretaps of Sarkozy's phones that began in 2013 over allegations he received an illegal and undeclared €50-million donation from the Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi to fund his successful 2007 presidential campaign. That case continues. He is expected to stand trial later this month in another case accusing him of overspending on his failed 2012 re-election campaign.

Sarkozy is the first former French president to appear in court. His predecessor Jacques Chirac was convicted in 2011 of misusing public funds when he was mayor of Paris and sentenced to a suspended two-year sentence but did not appear in court due to ill-health. ■

# What happens when a prisoner runs for parliament?

## Alain Lobognon's candidacy highlights the political fractures in Côte d'Ivoire

Leanne de Bassompierre

**A**mira Lobognon, the wife of jailed Ivorian member of parliament and former cabinet minister Alain Lobognon, breaks down in tears as she addresses voters under an appatam, a wall-less thatched hut, in the southern village of Gbagbam.

The 45-year-old mother of two has taken a couple of weeks off from her job in the private sector to get her husband re-elected as an independent candidate in tightly-contested National Assembly elections in Côte d'Ivoire on March 6.

"God only knows how his candidacy was retained by the electoral commission," Amira told *The Continent*, in an interview in the back seat of her car, while driving from village to village on dirt roads during a tightly-packed election campaign.

Alain has been detained since December 23 2019 for his links to exiled former prime minister and ex-rebel leader Guillaume Soro, but has yet to be charged.

"They say he was part of a coup plot, but they raided our home when I wasn't there and didn't find anything," she says,



**Self-imposed exile: Guillaume Soro may be in Europe, but his supporters continue to be politically active at home**

her deep devotion to her husband's plight plain to see as she speaks of the different prison facilities he's been transferred to during his 14 month incarceration. Some have likened her commitment to her husband's fight to late South African anti-apartheid icon, Winnie Mandela.

Soro resigned from his position as speaker of the National Assembly in February 2019 after falling out with President Alassane Ouattara.

He was convicted in absentia of money laundering and embezzlement months before presidential polls last year, which ultimately prevented him from running against Ouattara, who won a landslide

third mandate in the vote boycotted by the main opposition parties. The 48-year-old opposition leader has been living in exile in Europe and his Generation et Peuple Solidaires party will not be contesting the parliamentary polls, as they deem the institutions in charge of organising the elections to be unfit.

But the violence and calls for civil disobedience that preceded the presidential vote in October has been replaced by active electioneering across the length and breadth of Côte d'Ivoire.

For example, Michel Gbagbo, the son of former president Laurent Gbagbo, is drumming up support in the sprawling Abidjan neighborhood of Yopougo; and Patrick Achi, the secretary general in the presidency, has been addressing locals of the town of Adzope in their native Attie to ensure his victory for the ruling Rally of Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace party, which is seeking to consolidate its majority in parliament. There are 255 seats in 205 constituencies that are up for grabs.

Alain will be squaring off, against among others, his uncle – Maritime Transport Minister Philippe Légré – who is running as the ruling party candidate in what is deemed a litmus test of sorts

to retain his ministerial position when a new cabinet is appointed next month.

## **Lobognon will be squaring off against, among others, his uncle Philippe Légré, who is running as the ruling party candidate**

“I have written 87 letters to embassies, international organisations and even the French president,” says Amira, who has also managed to drum up a lot of support on social media. After all, Alain, was the first Ivorian to be jailed for a tweet in a separate case, earlier in 2019, which the public prosecutor said had incited violent clashes. He was sentenced to one year behind bars and ordered to pay the equivalent of \$520 in CFA francs, but those charges were later dropped.

The Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union denounced his detention this week and called on authorities to release him by dropping the charges against him and other members of parliament.

“He fought for Ouattara (to come to power),” says Amira. “And now he’s sitting in jail.”

---

### **EDITOR'S NOTE**

*The Continent* is experimenting with different forms of journalism and storytelling. For this story, **Leanne de Bassompierre** worked with Abidjan-based graphic journalist **Roland Polman** to tell the same story in pictures instead of words. Let us know what you think on WhatsApp or Signal (+27 73 805 6068).

---

DEPARTMENT OF FRESCO, SOUTHWEST  
COTE D'IVOIRE.



CITIZENS ARE LEARNING HOW TO VOTE  
FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.



LEADING THE CAMPAIGN IS AMIRA LOBOGNON.  
BUT SHE IS NOT THE CANDIDATE ON THE  
BALLOT PAPER.



INSTEAD SHE REPRESENTS HER  
HUSBAND, JAILED MEMBER OF  
PARLIAMENT, ALAIN LOBOGNON.



THIS FORMER MINISTER AND OUTGOING MEMBER  
OF PARLIAMENT WAS ARRESTED DECEMBER 2019  
FOR "CONSPIRACY AND ATTACK AGAINST STATE  
AUTHORITY" ALONG WITH FOUR OTHER MEMBERS  
OF PARLIAMENT CLOSE TO EXILED FORMER PRIME  
MINISTER GUILLAUME SORO.



THEY HAVE NOTHING  
AGAINST HIM!





LOBOGNON HAD EARLIER BEEN SENTENCED TO ONE YEAR IN PRISON FOR A TWEET ABOUT THE IMMINENT ARREST OF A FELLOW MP.

Alain Lobognon @Alainlobog

L'@assnatci a requis la suspension de la poursuite du Député Ehouo Jacques, en application des dispositions de l'article 92 alinéa 3 de la Constitution et de l'article 45 alinéa 3 de son Règlement. Malgré cela, le procureur a ordonné l'arrestation de notre collègue. #Alerte

9:29 PM · 8 Jan. 2019

♡ 92 💬 130 📄 Partager ce Tweet

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT A PRISONER CAN BE A CANDIDATE?

IT'S A MIRACLE FROM GOD.

I SENT SOMEONE TO CHECK ALAIN'S CRIMINAL RECORD.



"WHEN I RECEIVED THE DOCUMENT, I SMILED. IF THE RECORD WAS NOT BLANK, HE COULD NOT RUN IN THE ELECTIONS. WE THEREFORE SUBMITTED HIS CANDIDACY AND IT WAS ACCEPTED BY THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION."



BUT WHAT ARE THE CHANCES THAT HE WINS?

I HEARD THAT THERE IS A SYSTEM TO CHEAT. OUR VOTERS ARE AFRAID.



WE WERE THREATENED. THEY WANT TO PREVENT US FROM GOING OUT TO VOTE.



AMIRA'S CAMPAIGNING ON HER HUSBAND'S BEHALF BECAUSE SHE BELIEVES THAT ONLY VOTERS CAN GET HER HUSBAND OUT OF PRISON.



THE ONLY MESSAGE I HAVE FOR YOU "GET MY HUSBAND OUT OF JAIL".





Blues/Skies:  
Joshua Nkomo  
keeps an eye  
on Bulawayo

# Welcome to Bulawayo

**Bulawayo is not just Zimbabwe's former industrial hub. It's a melting pot of people, places and pleasantries, writes Ngqwele Dube – our first reader submission!**

Bulawayo, "koNtuthu Ziyathunqa" (where smoke bellows), Skies, "Komfazi utshay' indoda" (where wives beat their husbands) and Blues are some of the names given to Zimbabwe's second largest city that has its roots in the Ndebele kingdom set up by King Mzilikazi in the mid-19th century.

## City Vibe check

Many of the people here are friendly and most are multilingual, and won't hesitate to assist in the language you converse in.

Traffic, both foot and vehicular, can

give one a headache in the central business district, particularly on Friday afternoons and at month end, but there are many alternative roads.

Blues is laid back, reflecting the character of its inhabitants: casual, calm and unpretentious. There is something here for everyone.

## Getting around town

A taxi cab is the most convenient mode of transport, taking you anywhere within the central business district for a flat fee of \$2 while going outside the CBD will cost \$1 per kilometre – but for longer trips one can hire a

vehicle, and hospitality places also have cabs on standby.

For trips to outside the CBD, one can opt for public transport – popularly known as kombis or “umtshova” at \$0.50 for a truly local experience for up to 15km.

Their fares, however, double after 8pm.

## Meals and treats

Traditional African cuisine is my favourite and Sis Bee's Kitchen prepares their bream in a mouthwatering way that delights the palate; boiled or fried, it will leave you licking your fingers. It costs between \$4 and \$6 and it goes down well with isitshwala samabele (sorghum or millet pap).

For an additional \$2 you can choose an extra side dish of vegetables such as ibhobola (pumpkin leaves) or ulude (Spider-wisp).

But, as they say, variety is the spice of life and on Sis Bee's menu you can find other delicious dishes such as oxtail, meaty bones, offal, goat meat, biltong in peanut butter, nkukhu makhaya (free range chicken) and amasi (sour milk).

For a quick bite on the go, Oriental Pies offers the best pie (\$3) in the city, if not in the country. Indaba Book Café offers tasty, light meals and sandwiches with coffee for between \$2 and \$6, while Haefelis offers a range of quality confectionery along with hearty breakfast meals.

## Best bars

Bulawayo's nightlife is never short



of action or variety. There is a vast selection of bars and pubs in Blues, from the serene Sethule Bar at the Rainbow Hotel to the classy outdoor Zara Lounge a stone's throw as well as Vibe.

A weekend is not complete without delectable braai spots including ko Matsika located in Luveve suburb that is usually teeming with crowds on any day of the week although on weekends it is a certain full house. Tshisa Nyama, at Hartsfield within the city, is also a favourite with young crowds, and East 68 **(1)** provides a sanctuary for the more mature, among us, offering an indoor and outdoor setting. A pervasive culture of shebeens or unlicensed pubs haunts the city and, though illegal, they are wildly popular.

## Sightseeing

Well known for being the burial place of the infamous coloniser, Cecil John Rhodes, Matobo Hills National Park is a World Heritage site situated 36km outside Bulawayo.

It has pronounced high rock formations but also has rock paintings, caves, wildlife that includes



the white rhino and the revered Njelele traditional religious shrine. Entrance will cost between \$12 and \$15. There are also lodge facilities and campsites for a weekend getaway.

The Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, on the edge of the city, offers an all-encompassing account of Zimbabwe's wildlife (which is preserved and can give the nervous a fright) and the country's human history – with a section housing live snakes.

The City Hall curio market, National Art Gallery, Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre, National Railway Museum, Khami Ruins (2) and iconic politician Joshua Nkomo's statue are some of the attractions one can also visit.

### Favourite time of year

December is the party month in Bulawayo, when every third vehicle bears the famous blue and white GP number plates from neighbouring South Africa's Gauteng province.

The seasonal visit of Zimbabweans

working in South Africa, popularly referred to as *injiva*, brings with it nonstop partying. When *injiva* are at home, every day is a party. In December merrymaking is the order of the day.

### One song that represents the feel of the city

Despite being released over 30 years ago, Lovemore Majaivana's *Umoya Wami* remains an iconic song resonating far and wide with natives of the city as it evokes deep-seated nostalgic emotions.

Considered a musical prophet because of his incisive lyrics, Majaivana speaks of being away from his homeland and his spirit longing for a return: *umoya wami bo awusekho lapha khangela wena ukhathshana kontuthu ziyathunqa* (my spirit is not here, it is very far in Bulawayo).

But for him to make the return, the singer calls for the creation of jobs, re-opening of factories and construction of houses, issues that still resonate with the current generation afflicted with unemployment and shortage of housing in the city.

The track's laid-back, mid-tempo rhythm, which one can tap along to, sway the head to or dance the traditional dance, *ingquzu* to, suggests a people that are proud of their city although aware of struggles facing them. ■



**Do you want to show us around your town or city?**

Send an email to [thecontinent@mg.co.za](mailto:thecontinent@mg.co.za) and we'll be in touch!

# The evidence of war crimes in Tigray is impossible to ignore

## EDITORIAL

**I**n the early hours of November 4, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched a military assault against the regional government of Tigray, a powerful northern province. He claimed that Tigray's leaders had attacked an Ethiopian military base the night before.

Abiy termed this a "law enforcement operation". But from the outside it looked more like a civil war, with both the army and air force deployed to seize control from the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). They were assisted by troops from neighbouring Eritrea.

Abiy – a Nobel Peace Prize winner, no less – promised that the military operation would be conducted with a minimum of casualties. Initially, it was impossible for journalists to hold Abiy to this promise because the government had imposed an information blackout: all access to the area was denied, and internet and phone lines in the region were cut.

But, as the war dragged on, even Ethiopia's infamously repressive state apparatus could not keep a lid on increasingly horrific reports emerging from Tigray. Tens of thousands of refugees have fled the region into neighbouring Sudan, bringing stories of death and destruction with them. Intermittent

communications have allowed photos and video footage to emerge. And satellite imagery clearly shows the before and after of buildings and settlements that have been destroyed.

Using this information, human rights organisations and journalists have been able to verify some of the alleged atrocities committed by Ethiopian government forces and their Eritrean allies (read on to learn about what happened in the town of Axum, and in the villages of Dengelat and Debre Abay). These may be war crimes, say Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The United States government thinks that ethnic cleansing is taking place. And the TPLF's leadership, in hiding, has warned of a "genocidal war".

Ethiopia continues to make it nearly impossible to access the region. Humanitarian convoys have been prevented from travelling to most areas affected by the conflict, denying potentially lifesaving assistance to the estimated 2.3-million people who need it. And, after granting permits to several international media houses, the government promptly arrested four Ethiopian journalists working with the BBC, AFP and the *Financial Times* (they were released this week after an international outcry).

Meanwhile, the fighting continues.

Ethiopia's future, and that of the wider Horn of Africa region, hangs in the balance. ■



### Axum

Axum, or Aksum, is a small town in Ethiopia's far north, not far from the border with Eritrea. It is one of the country's most historic sites: capital of the Aksumite Empire, home to the legendary Queen of Sheba, and resting place of the Biblical Ark of the Covenant, as per the traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

It is also the site of an alleged massacre of hundreds of civilians late last year, allegedly by Eritrean soldiers. The massacre has been reported by both Amnesty and Human Rights Watch,

with both rights groups calling for an international investigation into war crimes committed there.

Ethiopian and Eritrean troops are said to have approached the town on November 19, indiscriminately shelling civilian areas and causing serious casualties. In the days that followed, there was widespread looting by the soldiers, including of the hospital pharmacy.

But things got really bad when the town tried to fight back.

On November 28, a few dozen members of a Tigrayan militia, along with some of the town's residents, attacked an Eritrean army platoon at a waterpoint, killing ten Eritrean soldiers.

The retaliation from the Eritrean forces over the next few days was swift and brutal. Several hundred residents, mostly men and boys, were summarily executed. One 17-year-old survivor described what happened to his neighbours: "[The soldiers] made them take off their belts, then their shoes. They lined them up and walked behind them. The Eritrean soldiers fired their guns. The first three then fell. They fired other shots, and the other three fell."

## Retaliation from Eritrean forces was swift and brutal

On November 30, instead of celebrating the religious festival of Saint Mary, Axumites spent the day burying their dead. "Our festival became a funeral," one mourner told Human Rights Watch.



**After the massacre: Life in Dengelat village, carved into Tigray's mountains, will never be the same again**

## Dengelat

The Ethiopian Orthodox festival of Tsion Maryam – Saint Mary – is an annual gathering of religious faithful, marking the day Ethiopians believe the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the country from Jerusalem. Congregants are often in flowing white robes, dancing and ululating in celebration, with food provided to mark the occasion.

Last year's festival was supposed to be a respite from the ongoing war between the Ethiopian national government and the TPLF in Tigray. But at the Maryam Dengelat church, nestled in the mountainous Dengelat village in Tigray, violence erupted on November 30 when Eritrean soldiers, identified by their dialect and fatigues, opened fire on congregants who were celebrating mass.

Eyewitnesses say people fled on foot but the soldiers pursued them and fired into the mountains. The rampage went on for three days, with soldiers searching from door to door to find villagers and

pilgrims who had made the journey for the festival. Abraham, the pseudonym of one of the eyewitnesses who spoke to CNN, estimates the dead to be about 100, including a 15-year-old boy named Yohannes Yosef. Priests, women and more than 20 Sunday school children were among those killed.

"We only survived by the grace of God," Abraham told CNN.

In a statement to the news outlet, the Ethiopian government said it would "continue bringing all perpetrators to justice following thorough investigations into alleged crimes in the region".

The UN high commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet, has called for an "independent, objective assessment" of the situation on the ground in Tigray, given the "deeply distressing reports of sexual and gender-based violence, extrajudicial killings, widespread destruction and looting of public and private property by all parties."

## Debre Abay

“The ground of the Tigrayan village is soaked with blood and dozens of bodies lie strewn in the grass. Groans can be heard from a seriously wounded man squirming on the floor between two corpses. Chatting as they wander through the aftermath of what appears to be a mass execution of civilians in the Tigray region, soldiers laugh and joke among themselves.”

So begins Zecharias Zelalem’s report for *The Telegraph* on a massacre allegedly committed by Ethiopian soldiers in Debre Abay, the site of a historic monastery in central Tigray. The video footage appears to have been recorded by an Ethiopian soldier in the aftermath of the attack. He verified the video using geolocation techniques.

*The Telegraph* deemed the video footage too graphic to be published. The timing of the video could not be determined, but reports from TPLF-aligned media claim that a massacre took place here on January 5.

The bodies of around 40 civilians can be seen in the video. “You should have finished off the survivors,” the unidentified cameraman says, speaking in Amharic, with an accent associated with southern or western Ethiopia.

## “You should have finished off the survivors”

At one point, civilians off-screen can be heard begging for their lives, as soldiers debate whether to kill a survivor who is trying to limp away to safety. Eventually,



they agree to let him live.

The Ethiopian government has imposed a near-total information blackout on the conflict-affected areas of Tigray, and has made access extremely difficult if not impossible for journalists, rights monitors and humanitarian organisations. Despite this, the accounts from eyewitnesses and refugees suggest that widespread atrocities have been committed – and the footage from Debre Abay offers video proof.

## **Despite the near-total information blackout imposed by the Ethiopian government, accounts from eyewitnesses and refugees suggest atrocities are widespread**

### **International reaction**

Days after Ethiopia's government referred to the killings in Axum as an "alleged incident" and the country's ambassador to Belgium dismissed it as a "very, very crazy idea," the government now says it will investigate "credible allegations of atrocities and human rights abuses" in Tigray.

And with Eritrean troops said to be involved in the killings, the US government is calling for Eritrean troops to leave Tigray. The crisis in Ethiopia, a US ally, is a test for President Joe Biden's administration and officials are worried that ethnic cleansing is taking place in parts of Tigray, according to an internal

document obtained by the *New York Times*.

In a call this week with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Secretary of State Antony Blinken "pressed for the immediate end to hostilities and the withdrawal of outside forces from Tigray, including Amhara regional security forces and Eritrean troops," according to state department spokesman Ned Price. Blinken also urged Abiy to allow independent and international investigations into "reported human rights abuses and violations and to hold those responsible accountable".

Blinken had earlier called on the African Union, whose response has been muted so far, to "work with the US to address the crisis in Tigray, including through action at the UN and other relevant bodies." The AU's last statement on the matter came last November when Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat appealed for an "immediate cessation of hostilities".

The UN echoed the US's call for the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Tigray at a Security Council meeting this week.

But the council meeting, called by Ireland, failed to reach consensus on a joint statement, with Russia, China and non-permanent member India objecting to the statement, according to reports.

While Russia and China believed a statement would amount to interference in a sovereign nation's internal affairs, India was said to have opposed the statement because it would have focused too narrowly on the humanitarian situation. ■

# Investigate crimes in Tigray now, or risk a fragmented Ethiopia

## ANALYSIS

Claire Wilmot and Samuel Gebre

**A**fter nearly four months of violent conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, the government has admitted that widespread crimes have been committed. Despite a growing consensus that the Ethiopian armed forces have perpetrated some of this violence, the government has rejected calls for external involvement in investigations, arguing that it is capable of conducting impartial investigations and holding perpetrators to account.

Whether such an accountability process will be satisfactory to victims and survivors of the conflict, however, remains to be seen.

The credibility of any justice process depends on whether evidence can be gathered quickly, or it risks being destroyed or degraded to such an extent that it is no longer legally viable.

“The longer it takes an investigation the less likely that the evidence is going to be credible,” said Chidi Odinkalu of the Africa Program of the Open Society Justice Initiative.

Others agree: “You can’t really

stress how important it is to gather evidence as quickly as possible,” said Mark Kersten, senior consultant at the Wayamo Foundation and a research fellow at the University of Toronto. In any conflict, evidence may be destroyed by perpetrators seeking to cover their tracks. “But what is perhaps as latently troublesome is the fact that evidence simply degrades over time,” Kersten added.

## Greater challenge in SGBV cases

An Ethiopian women’s rights advocate who is in contact with first responders in Tigray told us that, in addition to violence perpetrated by armed groups, at least some of the sexual violence being perpetrated appears to be opportunistic, reflecting the breakdown of security and justice systems in the region.

“Some of [the assaults] are just people who have the opportunity to rape now, because the police are not functioning, only the military is there and they aren’t focused on law and order,” she said. “There is no avenue for bringing charges forward right now because the justice system isn’t functioning,” she added. Her name is being withheld to protect her

safety.

Best practice in evidence and testimony collection for SGBV cases in conflict recommends storing reports in a digital cloud, to protect victims and survivors. The internet blackout that persists across much of Tigray makes this kind of evidence preservation impossible. Furthermore, hospitals and health centres are operating at reduced capacity due to widespread looting, and the region is facing a shortage of “rape kits” for evidence collection.

### **The need for justice in Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has led several fact-finding missions, mostly in Western Tigray where Ethiopian forces are in control. Federal forces are believed to control only 60% to 80% of Tigray, meaning Eritrean and other armed groups must withdraw and cease hostilities to allow investigations to take place.

The volume of war crimes allegations continues to grow. The regional police and justice system in Tigray is not functioning, and the EHRC and federal joint-task forces may soon be overstretched.

Federal police are also not trusted in Tigray. “Because of the distrust, most activists are looking beyond Ethiopia for help with investigations—the UN, even the African Union or Intergovernmental Authority on Development,” a Toronto-based Tigrayan activist told us.

After reports on civilian massacres in Axum, the EHRC said they were

investigating “with support of technical experts from international human rights agencies.” It is not clear what degree of external involvement will be allowed.

**The credibility of any justice process depends on whether evidence can be gathered quickly, or it risks being destroyed or degraded to such an extent that it is no longer legally viable**

Activists say Abiy’s government can no longer afford to think of only the present moment as it considers investigations and accountability. “When [the government] think about investigations, they see it as a short-term game. Not from a long-term reconciliation perspective,” one activist said, noting that a lack of accountability was a significant challenge in Ethiopia even before the conflict began.

External investigations could lend credibility to the Ethiopian government’s stated commitment to accountability, and could help manage the volume of allegations. The window of opportunity for meaningful investigations, however, is rapidly closing.

Doing justice in Ethiopia was a daunting task even before the conflict in Tigray began – four months into active fighting, the challenge grows by the day, as does the risk of getting it wrong. ■

# SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how much you really know about our continent

## How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

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

5-8

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

9-12

"Pan-Africanism is part optimism, part solidarity, and part Burna Boy"

1. What is Benin's official language?
2. What is the demonym for someone from Djibouti?
3. "It always seems impossible until it's done," is often erroneously attributed to which former president?
4. What is the name of the active volcano (pictured) in the southwest region of Cameroon near the city of Buea?
5. Which country's government has not published Covid-19 statistics since mid 2020?
6. The cedi is the currency of which country?
7. In which city can one visit the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe and the Khami Ruins?
8. In what language was the chant "Ali Bomaye!", made famous during the "Rumble in the Jungle" in 1974?
9. Who is Botswana's president?
10. True or false: Lake Victoria is not one of the African Great Lakes.
11. Fes and Tangier are cities in which country?
12. Which west-central country's flag features three horizontal lines of yellow, green and blue?





Rise and fall:  
Norman Chisale  
(left) next to his  
boss, former  
president Peter  
Mutharika  
(Photo: Amos  
Gumulira/AFP)

## Meet Malawi's richest bodyguard

**Ex-president Peter Mutharika's security chief is struggling to account for his massive wealth (partly because it could put his old boss in jail).**

### Golden Matonga

**L**ast Friday, anti-corruption prosecutors in Malawi obtained a court order allowing them to seize property belonging to one Norman Chisale, who led the security detail for former president Peter Mutharika while he was in office.

Included in the court order was an itemised list of assets belonging to Chisale and his close associates, including his wife and daughter. It is a long list.

It includes 78 vehicles, most of them high-end, including Range Rovers, Land Cruisers, Mercedes Benzes, BMW X5s, Jeep Wranglers and a Hummer; at least two bank accounts registered in his name, containing

30-million kwacha (\$38,500) and 87-million kwacha (\$111,500) respectively; and 12 properties in Malawi, including lodges, residences and commercial office complexes. According to a source close to the investigation, also linked to Chisale are two properties in Russia; three in South Africa; and a mall in Zambia.

In total, the value of the Chisale's fortune amounts to at least 1.7-billion kwacha (\$2.2-million). Not bad for a bodyguard. Especially one who earned a monthly salary of 1.2-million kwacha (\$1,500) per month after tax while working for the president.

Even factoring in per diems and allowances, which could have raised his monthly income to 6.2-million kwacha (\$8,000), it would have taken him 274 years to earn his current wealth. Chisale, aged 45, has not been around quite that long – so how did he do it?

### **The president's right-hand man**

Chisale began his career in military intelligence, before getting a job in 2009 as a valet to then-president Bingu wa Mutharika. When the president died in office, Chisale transferred his loyalties to the man's brother, Peter Mutharika, who made an audacious – albeit unsuccessful – attempt to occupy State House himself.

Two years later, Peter Mutharika came to power anyway, in a disputed election. As a reward for his loyalty, Chisale became head of the president's personal security detail. This made Chisale one of the most powerful men in Malawi – and one of the most feared. In addition to the corruption charges, he is now facing multiple criminal charges, including murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, abuse of office, tax evasion and forgery. Prosecutors even claim that he faked the education certificates he used to get employment in the military, and later in the presidency.

(The murder charge relates to the grisly killing in 2015 of Issa Njauju, a top official from Malawi's Anti-Corruption Bureau, whose dismembered, decomposing body was found near a stream just a short distance from the presidential palace in Lilongwe.)

In 2020, in a rerun election, Peter Mutharika was kicked out of office. The new administration, led by President Lazarus Chakwera, has vowed to crack down on corruption – and Chisale has become the poster boy for the crimes of the previous administration.

Investigating and prosecuting financial crime is never easy. But investigators think they have a strong case against Chisale. In particular, they are looking into a dodgy multimillion dollar cement deal in which

he is supposed to have played a key role. No duty was paid on the cement as it was allegedly for President Mutharika's personal use.

### Shifting the blame

The *Mail & Guardian* put all these allegations to Chisale in an interview, in which he insisted he is not nearly as wealthy as prosecutors believe, and denied all wrongdoing.

He refused to answer questions about whether he owns any foreign property, saying that he would only respond to this in court. He said that he only owns a few cars, and that most of the vehicles attributed to him were gifts to the former president, received while in office, that Chisale had received and registered on his behalf.

He is happy to point investigators in the direction of Mutharika, who is by all accounts enjoying retirement at his beachside residence on Lake Malawi. "Sometimes the vehicles came as gifts for the president but the president would say, no, I don't want to touch that car, speak to my son Chisale," Chisale said.

"Then the person would call me and say I have spoken to the boss and he says I should speak to you. Then I would say, no problem ... They would say we have a car and they would ask me in whose name should the car be registered and my job was to receive the car and bring it to State House, and the president would direct whom I should give the car."

Chisale said that some of the vehicles were given to chiefs, religious leaders and the president's relatives.

Although this may look like a textbook patronage network, Chisale sees no issue with the practice. He said there is no crime in receiving gifts, and that every Malawian president has done the same.

Not that this will necessarily protect him – or Mutharika. Under the law, the former president may be held liable if investigators suspect that he abused his position for personal profit. Chisale's account means, at the very least, that it is now the former president who has some difficult questions to answer. ■



**Off the cuff: Norman Chisale outside court**

# Consistency isn't just for custard

Samira Sawlani

For many of us, March marks a year since the world changed. Twelve months of constant Zoom meetings and inconstant internet connectivity has taken its toll. Unlike our connections, however, at least we can rely on our leaders to remain consistent.

## Chad Unplugged

Let's start with President Deby of Chad, or "Field Marshal Idriss Deby Itno" as he sometimes likes to be called now. In March 2018 his government embarked on what would turn out to be a 16-month social media ban, during which the people of Chad were unable to access Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp until it was lifted in July 2019.

With elections set to take place next month, it seems the Field Marshmallow wants to show off his consistency (just in case running for a sixth term didn't get the message across). And, so, hot on the heels of a deadly raid on the home of opposition candidate Yaya Dillo by security forces, he pulled the plug on the national router once again.

Authorities said Dillo had ignored two judicial summons, so it sent officers to bring him in, but somebody shot at them,

prompting them to engage aggressively in self-defence. Five people were killed in the self-defence that ensued, Dillo says, including his own mother and son. But the government insists "only" two people died, and says three security officers were injured.

Cognisant that injustice delayed is injustice denied, the government took immediate and decisive action, opting to forgo any kind of investigation into the matter and skipping straight to stopping people from sharing selfies on Instagram.

See? Fixed.

## Unlinked in Niger

Niger entered unprecedented times last year, after President Mahamadou Issoufou announced he would not run for a third term and would instead be un-presidenting himself, setting the country up for its first peaceful transition of power.

Elections went into a second-round run-off which saw ruling party candidate Mohamed Bazoum face off against the opposition's Mahamane Ousmane. Bazoum was declared the winner last week, but Ousmane went public with allegations of fraud, and his supporters took to the streets in protests that left at



### **Love is blind (apparently): The not-so-diverse cast of new reality TV show Love Island South Africa**

considered by the powers are even less diverse than an episode of Love Island South Africa, which is quite a feat.

The idea that internet access should be a basic human right has been floated before. Until recently, the suggestion seemed to amuse people. But restricting that access is now so closely associated with oppression that perhaps it's time to start taking it seriously, although if it were a basic human right it wouldn't be the only one being stomped on.

### **Tigray – no signal, no data, no hope**

In Tigray, Ethiopia, there's been no internet since November. And what little information has emerged from Tigray suggests that unimaginable horrors have been taking place under the cover of cyberdarkness.

This week UN human rights Chief Michelle Bachelet called on the Ethiopian government to grant human rights monitors access to the region after “preliminary analysis suggests violations of international law, possibly amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity”.

It might be tempting to admire the immediate, decisive and consistent behaviour of these governments in their responses to dissent.

But consistency isn't everything. You know what else is all about consistency? Custard. Have you ever left custard out for a few days? After a while all that consistency starts to stink. ■

least two people dead, although nobody's quite sure how, exactly.

The unrest was troubling, so of course nothing else would do except immediate and decisive action. No more Instagram selfies for Nigeriens! Fixed.

### **404 error: Senegal not found**

Now, if you want consistency, everyone knows Senegal is the place to go. Quietly and peacefully going about its business with a glad heart and friendly smile with nary a political conflict in sight since... wait, since yesterday? Gosh.

It looks like after opposition leader Ousmane Sonko was accused of rape by an employee at his favourite massage salon, his supporters cried foul and started protesting. And we know what that means, right? If you guessed immediate and decisive action, you are now the winner of an all-expenses paid internet ban, courtesy of President Macky Salle! Be sure to post an instagram selfie if he ever switches the modem back on. But, yes: “Fixed.”

As solutions to conflict go, killing the internet sure is a popular choice. But it does make us think that the options

# Zambia's government is trying to seize control of the digital space

Hakainde Hichilema

**Z**ambians go to the polls in August this year, and we in the opposition expect all the usual obstacles: physical restrictions on campaigning, a crackdown on civil society, and the muzzling of independent media.

But this time we must also confront a new threat: the government's effort to seize control of Zambia's digital space.

The ruling Patriotic Front is seeking to resurrect the oppressive Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Bill.

It was shelved last year after an outcry from civil society, who said they were barely consulted, and raised the alarm about several concerning provisions.

But now the bill is back. The legislation was approved by cabinet on February 1, and is intended to promote the "responsible use of social media platforms". However, in its current form, the bill threatens to erode basic democratic norms.

If passed, the government will have

unrestricted power to listen in to people's private conversations without a court order – including citizens that have dissenting views to that of the ruling party.

Under the terms of the bill, all electronic communications providers – including internet messaging platforms – will have to provide services that are "capable of rendering real-time and full-time monitoring facilities for the interception of communications".

Unsurprisingly, a host of civil society organisations have already voiced their concerns in connection with the bill. Many have pointed out that it violates several international human rights laws which have been ratified by Zambia.

We have only to look to the recent example of Uganda to see what may lie ahead.

In Uganda's January 2021 elections, the government instituted a full shutdown of the internet as part of efforts to extend President Museveni's 35 years in office.

The proposed cyber bill is an oppressive piece of legislation that will infringe on the dignity and civil liberties of Zambian citizens well beyond the election period if it is allowed to pass.

It must be stopped. ■

*Hakainde Hichilema leads the United Party for National Development, an opposition political party in Zambia.*

# Ghana's LGBTQIA+ community is in danger and dire need

By **LGBT+ Rights Ghana**

**A**midst growing international criticism of the treatment of the LGBTQIA+ community in Ghana, President Nana Akufo-Addo issued a public statement on 27 February that gay marriage would not be legalised so long as he was in office. The statement was not new – he made similar remarks in 2018 – but in the current climate fueled rising public hate and homophobia. It also overlooked the main issue at hand, which is the protection of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The days before the president's comments had seen increasing repression. On 24 February, a raid took place on the office and safe space created by LGBT+ Rights Ghana that was coordinated by the landlord, the police, and the national security apparatus. As a result, most frontline activists and community members had to go into hiding just to stay safe, as the media reported on the raid and incited further attacks.

There have been reports of community members losing their jobs, and threats of violence. A transgender woman who went on TV in hopes to educate the public using her lived experience was met with death threats and had to relocate.

On a more positive note, the LGBTQIA+ community has received

considerable support from the international community and Ghanaians in the diaspora, who came together to write a letter of solidarity.

Some local celebrities added their voice to the fight for the protection of the queer community, while the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice released a press statement reminding the public that Ghana has ratified several international human rights instruments that binds the state to protect all persons, including LGBTQIA+ people.

This support shows that it is possible to make progress in the fight for human rights.

Yet the situation remains dangerous and urgent. Activists still face death and arrest and have to remain in hiding as their images have been paraded in the media.

We therefore call on everyone with a voice to speak out against these injustices, and to join the campaign to save lives by contributing to the GoFundMe account that can be found on all the social media handles of LGBT+ Rights Ghana. ■

*LGBT+ Rights Ghana (@LGBTRightsGhana) is a movement that champions the freedom & protection of all LGBTQIA+ persons in Ghana.*





## The Big Picture

**Wakanda Forever:** The wild African black leopard, also known as a black panther, is extremely rare. They are not often spotted in the wild, never mind photographed. This image is part of a series captured by photographer Will Burrard-Lucas in Kenya's Laikipia County, which will be published this month in his new book *The Black Leopard*.

*The Continent is produced with the Mail & Guardian, Africa's leading independent newspaper, and upholds the M&G's strict editorial standards. It is published by the Adamela Trust, a not-for-profit organisation founded by M&G journalists that is dedicated to fostering quality journalism. For queries and complaints, or to make a donation, please contact [TheContinent@mg.co.za](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za).*