

AFRICA WORKING GROUP

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE, RELIGION OR BELIEF FOR EVERYONE



The Honorable Marco Rubio

Secretary of State

2201 C Street NW

Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Mike Waltz

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations

799 United Nations Plaza

New York, NY 10017

Dear Secretary Rubio and Ambassador Waltz,

We, the undersigned, are individuals and organizations committed to defending freedom of religion or belief and human rights around the world. We write with deep and urgent concern regarding the deteriorating political and human rights situation in Tanzania, and to request meaningful action from the Administration and relevant U.S. agencies.

Election-Related Violence and Abuses

On October 29, Tanzania held national elections in which President Samia Suluhu Hassan was declared reelected. The elections unfolded amid massive protests and a government-imposed internet shutdown, raising widespread concerns about transparency and the legitimacy of the process. The violence that followed remains shrouded in uncertainty, with conflicting reports suggesting anywhere from 750 to over 1,000 deaths. These wide-ranging numbers, coupled with the blackout of communications, leave the true scale of the crisis unclear and deeply troubling.

Reports emerging from the ground describe severe abuses by security forces. Individuals—including members of faith-based communities—who dared to speak out against the violence have reportedly been targeted. In addition, there are disturbing accounts that security forces have been dumping the bodies of those killed. These allegations point to serious violations that demand urgent investigation and accountability.

International and U.S. Responses to Date

Growing international alarm reflects the seriousness of the situation. On November 11, UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk publicly called for an independent investigation into the violence that engulfed the country, a call that was soon echoed by Human Rights Watch and by Catholic leaders within Tanzania. Their unified voices highlight the need for greater scrutiny and transparency.

We recognize the State Department's decision on October 31 to renew the travel advisory for Tanzania and raise the alert level to Level 3: Reconsider Travel. While this update was directed primarily at protecting U.S. travelers, it acknowledges the instability on the ground and represents an initial step toward addressing the crisis. We also support the statement from leaders of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee urging a policy review toward Tanzania; their engagement signals rising bipartisan concern regarding the country's human rights trajectory.

Threats to Religious Communities

Although faith communities have not yet been officially labeled as specific targets of the security forces, we are particularly troubled by credible reports that religious leaders and other members of faith-based groups have been harassed or singled out for speaking publicly about the violence. Such actions threaten Tanzania's longstanding religious harmony and represent a dangerous erosion of human rights protections. Given the country's influence in the region, the treatment of religious voices warrants heightened U.S. attention.

Requested U.S. Actions

In light of these developments, we respectfully request:

1. **A U.S. call for an independent investigation** into the violence surrounding the October 29 elections, in alignment with the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Tanzanian religious leaders.
2. **A direct effort to seek clarification and accountability** for the reported killings, the alleged targeting of faith-based leaders, and the dumping of bodies by security forces.
3. **Placement of Tanzania on USCIRF's Special Watch List** under the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act.
4. **A comprehensive policy review** of U.S. engagement with Tanzania, coordinated closely with Congressional leadership.

Tanzania stands at a precarious moment, and the United States has a vital role to play in supporting transparency, defending vulnerable communities, and upholding international human rights norms. We urge the Administration to take the steps outlined above without delay.

Sincerely,

Nancy Carol James

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Organizations:

Denis Hurley Human Rights Institute

Genocide Watch