

Tanzania switches track, charges Kabendera with economic crimes

Prosecutors in Tanzania today charged freelance journalist Erick Kabendera with money laundering, tax evasion, and assisting an organized crime racket, according to a copy of the charge sheet. When he was detained on July 29, the Dar es Salaam police chief said at a press conference that police were investigating Kabendera's citizenship status.



Freelance journalist Erick Kabendera, who is detained in Tanzania. Credit: CPJ/Jamii Forums.

“It seems that for the past week, authorities have been searching for a way to justify their detention of this critical freelance journalist. First, they claimed Erick Kabendera’s citizenship was in question, today they have leveled drastically different charges, which call into question their motive for holding him,” said CPJ Sub-Saharan Africa representative Muthoki Mumo. “Prosecutors should immediately drop the charges against Kabendera and Tanzania should end its practice of retaliating against critical voices.”

The charge sheet, viewed by CPJ, alleged that Kabendera committed the offences between January 2015 and July 2019. Under [Tanzania’s Criminal Procedure Act](#), people accused of money laundering do not qualify for bail. Kabendera could remain in detention for the duration of his trial, Jones Sendodo, one of the lawyers representing the journalist, told CPJ. If convicted of assisting a criminal racket, Kabendera could be jailed for up to 15 years.

Since his arrest, authorities have searched the [journalist’s home at least twice](#), confiscated his passport and other documents, and [questioned his mother](#), according to media reports. In addition to being interrogated about his citizenship, Kabendera was also [questioned on allegations](#) of [sedition](#) and cybercrime offences, according to the BBC and other reports.

In a statement last week, the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition said that Kabendera's rights to due process had been violated, as police moved him from station to station after arrest, denying him access to legal representation and his family.

In a video posted to Twitter today, [Jebra Kambole](#), who is also representing Kabendera, said the journalist has not yet been questioned for the crimes on the charge sheet, adding, "It is journalism work that has brought Erick here."

Kabendera will be detained at Segerea prison in Dar es Salaam until August 19, when the next hearing in his case is scheduled, his lawyer, Sendodo, said.

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