

The Continent



**Egypt's screen to
prison pipeline**



COVER: Egypt already holds tens of thousands of prisoners in pre-trial detention. Now, children who are into online gaming are increasingly part of that number. After falling victim to online manipulation, they get caught in security sweeps that don't seem to care about criminal intent or children's rights. Recruiters promise gamers virtual rewards, like in-game tokens, weapons or gear, in exchange for posting political messages. When Egyptian security forces swoop in, they arrest the minors for spreading false news or joining banned groups, charge them with terrorism and detain them indefinitely. This escalation of Egypt's crackdown on dissent has entrapped more than a dozen children in the last 18 months, civil society organisations say. *Read the story on p11.*

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We'll be right back (with a brand new member of the family)

The next issue of this newspaper will drop on 18 October. We are taking a few weeks for the usual: recharge, contemplate the meaning of life, do errands — **and launch a new newspaper!** *The Continent's* new sibling will focus on South Africa – but only once we decide what to call it. Please, for our sanity and team cohesion, **help us pick from the final two options.** Once that's in the world, we'll return for the final season of 2025, which wraps in December with our Africans of the Year celebration.

THE WEEK IN BRIEF

FRANCE

You're nicked: Sarkozy jailed for five years

Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy has been sentenced to five years in jail for criminal conspiracy. It is the first time a former head of state has been jailed in modern French history, *The Guardian* reports. He was found guilty of colluding with the late deposed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, who illegally funded Sarkozy's presidential campaign in 2007. The Libyan regime requested diplomatic, legal, and business favours in return for the money.

MALAWI

Mutharika boomerangs back into the boss chair

Malawi's former president Peter Mutharika, 85, won last week's elections, securing 57% of the vote against incumbent Lazarus Chakwera's 33%. It is the second such comeback in Africa in recent times, after Ghana's John Dramani Mahama reclaimed power in December, suggesting voters are ready to punish leaders who disappoint them, but also willing to give former presidents another chance when the political mood and economic conditions shift.



PHOTO: RIJASOLO/AFP

Bottled rage: Cops pounce on a demonstrator at a service delivery protest in Antananarivo.

MADAGASCAR

'Mad' in Madagascar means angry at Andry

Antananarivo is under a dusk-to-dawn curfew after protests on Thursday over power cuts and water shortages, *Reuters* reports. Police fired tear gas to disperse thousands of mostly young demonstrators in the capital. Earlier in the day, protesters reportedly looted and set fire to a large shopping mall and vandalised two lawmakers' homes. The unrest highlights frustration with basic service delivery failures and President Andry Rajoelina's administration in general.



BIG TECH

Blair pivots from policy to product placement

An investigation by *Democracy for Sale* has exposed blurred ties between Larry Ellison's software company Oracle and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI). It suggests the charity operates as a lobbying arm for Oracle, with former staff in Kenya saying TBI shifted from policy work to pushing Oracle tools. In 2020, as Ethiopia edged towards civil war, TBI was drafting an AI policy that promoted testing self-driving cars there. In 2021, Rwanda issued a tender for a new database system after years of frustration with Oracle's costs.

SOUTH SUDAN

Former VP kicks off treason trial in a cage

The trial of former first vice-president Riek Machar began this week. He was sacked by President Salva Kiir earlier this month. Machar is charged with murder, treason, and crimes against humanity for an ethnically motivated militia attack, *Al Jazeera* reports. Machar and seven others appeared in court in a cage. His party calls the charges fabricated and politically motivated. The United Nations has warned the case risks reigniting civil war in a country still reeling from years of conflict and corruption.



EGYPT

Alaa Abd el-Fattah freed, six years later

Prominent Egyptian-British activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah has been released from prison after six years behind bars, reports *AFP*. Abd el-Fattah, a leading voice in Egypt's 2011 uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak, was jailed in 2019 for "spreading false news". He has now been pardoned by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. His release followed sustained pressure from rights groups, his family, and the British government. Although Abd el-Fattah still faces a travel ban, rights groups have welcomed the pardon, urging Egypt to free other dissidents.

GUINEA

Path clear for putschy Doumbouya to stay put

Voters in Guinea have overwhelmingly backed a new constitution that could allow coup leader Mamady Doumbouya to run for president if he so chooses, according to provisional referendum results. The changes will also extend presidential terms from five to seven years. Critics call it a power grab, reports *Al Jazeera*, saying that it legitimises military rule and gives Doumbouya even more power. Major opposition figures boycotted the vote and Doumbouya has not yet said whether he intends to run for office.

THE HAGUE

West Africa's problem children quit the ICC

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have announced their withdrawal from the International Criminal Court, calling it a "neocolonialist" tool biased against Africa, the *BBC* reports. The court has mostly prosecuted African cases since its founding. In a joint statement, the three countries rejected the court's authority, vowing to create their own justice systems. The move comes amid the juntas' growing ties with Russia and follows an earlier joint withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States. All three regimes face allegations of abuses as they battle jihadist groups in the Sahel.

ALGERIA

Zidane Jr frexits himself a shot at the World Cup

Luca Zidane, son of French football legend Zinedine Zidane, has changed allegiance from France to Algeria, reports *Foot Africa*. The 27-year-old goalkeeper, who played for France at youth level, hopes to join Algeria's squad for the 2026 World Cup qualifiers. Zidane, born near Marseille, qualifies through his father's Algerian roots in Kabylie. He is currently at Spanish club Granada after stints at Real Madrid and Rayo Vallecano. Fifa has approved the switch, potentially allowing Zidane to follow in his dad's footsteps at the World Cup.

CAMEROON

Amnesty badgers Biya as Brenda bins her dad

Amnesty International has called for the release of 36 supporters of Cameroon's opposition Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC). They have been detained for five years over peaceful protests against President Paul Biya. Another 54 MRC members were detained in August, but were released shortly after. Biya, 92, seeks another term in the October elections after 43 years in power. Last week, Biya's daughter Brenda urged voters not to vote for her father, saying he had dragged the country into poverty and decades of stagnation.

UGANDA

Bosco gets the green light for one last rodeo

Uganda's electoral commission has cleared 81-year-old President Yoweri Museveni to run for re-election in 2026, potentially extending his rule to nearly 50 years. Museveni has held power since 1986. He has been praised for economic and health gains in the country, but also criticised for rights abuses and repression. His main challenger remains pop-star-turned-politician Bobi Wine, who garnered 35% of the vote in 2021, with Museveni taking 58% – in his worst-ever result. Museveni has said – again



PHOTO: YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP

Yolo: Yoweri Museveni has collected many hip and groovy nicknames over the years including M7, Sevo, Bosco Katala and Muhoozi's Daddy.

– that this is the last time he will vie for president.

NEWS

UNITED STATES

Trump's deportation diplomacy triggers domestic headaches

Campaigners and people deported to African shores are suing participating countries and demanding answers.

KIRI RUPIAH

AT LEAST three African countries that have accepted people expelled by the United States are now facing pressure from lawyers and campaigners.

Ghana received 14 West African nationals – and sent most of them on to other countries. Eleven of the people deported, including Nigerians, Togolese, Malians, a Liberian, and a Gambian, had sued to stop Ghana from expelling them.

But they were removed before their case was heard – and without assessing whether they would be safe in the destination countries. Six were sent to Togo, though only three were Togolese; the others' whereabouts are unknown.

The group's lead counsel Oliver Barker-Vormawor told *The Continent* the legal team would continue to pursue the case in Ghana's courts and the ECOWAS Court of Justice. He said Ghana may have violated the principle in international law of non-refoulement, which forbids sending refugees and asylum seekers to places where they may face danger.

Last month, human rights defenders sued Eswatini for accepting five people from the US, saying it had participated in illegal deportations. Amnesty International is now calling on the public to write to the country's justice minister asking to know the grounds on which they are being detained. The campaign also revealed their names: Roberto Mosquera Del Peral, Kassim Saleh Wasil, Dung Tien Nguyen, Phone Chomsavanh, and Orville Etoria.

A similar campaign is urging people to write to South Sudan's foreign affairs ministry to ask where six deported men are and why they are being held. Jose Manuel Rodriguez-Quinones, Enrique Arias Hierro, Kyaw Mya, Nyo Myint, Thongxay Nilakout, and Tuan Thanh Phan were sent to South Sudan on 4 July. That was after a stop at the US base in Djibouti, where they were reportedly held in a converted shipping container.

Other African countries might find themselves in similar situations. Rwanda has received seven of an expected 250 migrants. Uganda has also agreed to a migrant deal with the US. ■

ZIMBABWE

Lithium boom uproots locals

Chinese mining concessions force families from land they have farmed for generations.

JEFFREY MOYO IN HARARE

ZIMBABWEAN authorities took farmlands back from white farmers in the early 2000s to redress colonial imbalances. Two decades later, in lithium-rich areas, land is parceled off again – this time to Chinese miners.

Life as Shadreck Hombarume knew it ended in 2021 when the fields his family had farmed for generations were marked off as part of the mining concession for Max Mind Investments. The lithium mining and processing company, a subsidiary of Chinese giant Chengxin Lithium Group, operates the Sabi Star mine in Buhera, Manicaland province.

Hombarume now survives as a vendor in the small town of Murambinda Growthpoint. He lives in a single room, together with his wife and two children. “I haven’t been compensated for the land I lost,” he told *The Continent*.

In a statement sent to *The Continent*, a Max Mind spokesperson said: “To our knowledge, all villagers who

previously occupied the area that the mine has taken up, were all properly engaged, compensated and relocated.” The company said that it relocated 45 families to areas of their choice, including Murambinda.

Zimbabwe holds the world’s fifth-largest reserves of lithium, a mineral vital for producing electric-car batteries. China is the world’s largest producer of – and market for – electric vehicles and is buying large tracts of lithium-rich land to sustain the industry.

In 2023, 72% of new mining licences issued in Zimbabwe went to Chinese companies, according to the Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency.

But the price local communities pay for the global green transition is invisible.

David Gweshe says he was forced to relocate 70km after Shengxiang Investments acquired a 100-hectare mining concession in Goromonzi, east of Harare, in 2023. He says he received only \$1,000 from the company, instead of the \$5,000 he was expecting. A Shengxiang Investments representative did not respond to a request for comment.

For years, Gweshe had nurtured fruit trees in Goromonzi but was barred from harvesting after the takeover. “The people working for the Chinese denied me access. They are eating from my fruit trees while I starve with my family.” ■

BOTSWANA

World champs: When it pours, the pula reigns

The country's laughing all the way to the bank after Gaborone quartet pulls off relay coup in Tokyo.

KEVIN D. MOFOKENG IN GABORONE

IT WAS raining hard in Tokyo when the Botswana men's 4x400m relay team made history on Sunday, claiming gold at the World Athletics Championships and stunning the sprinting community.

Victory in those conditions felt especially auspicious. It rains so little in Botswana that the country's people revere precipitation. The Setswana word for rain – pula – also means wealth or blessing, and lends its name to the country's currency.

During the downpour, Lee Bhekempilo Eppie, Letsile Tebogo, Bayapo Ndori, and Busang Collen Kebinatshipi finished the race in 2:57.76, narrowly edging out the United States and South Africa.

The victory capped an extraordinary weekend for Kebinatshipi, who had earlier clocked 43.53 seconds in the

individual 400m race, winning gold and setting a national record.

Back home, President Duma Boko declared 29 September a public holiday to celebrate the champions. The Bank of Botswana, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, announced that the relay heroes will be immortalised on a commemorative P50 banknote. "Every note will carry their faces into daily life, turning money into memory," said the bank's spokesperson.

Botswana will host the World Athletics Relays in Gaborone on 2 to 3 May next year, bringing the joy home at a time when the country's sprinters are dominating the world.

Tebogo, the country's most famous sportsperson, won Olympic gold in the 100m sprint last year and has held the Under-22 world record for that race since 2022. Pula! ■



PHOTO: DANIELA PORCELLI/GETTY IMAGES

Baton deluge: Bayapo Ndori, Letsile Tebogo, Lee Bhekempilo Eppie and Busang Collen Kebinatshipi of Botswana celebrate winning the 4x400 in Tokyo.

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REPORT

Battle royale: How Egypt's anti-terror traps are dooming teen gamers

Egyptian investigators are notorious for clamping down on political dissent. Now teenagers are being imprisoned for 'terrorism' – often without trial – after falling victim to online manipulation.

AMINAH MOHIE EL DIN IN CAIRO

OVER past 18 months, Egyptian authorities have detained 15 children aged 12 to 17 on terror charges, according to human rights groups. The path to their detention almost always starts with online video games.

In August 2024, 17-year-old Mohamed Emad was lying on his bed in Cairo playing PUBG when Egyptian security forces banged on his family's door. Officers swept in, ransacked rooms, seized the building's CCTV footage, and took him away. The family had been visiting relatives in Cairo for the summer from their home in Maryland, United States.

Emad reappeared in court 10 days later. The Supreme State Security Prosecution, a special department of the public prosecutor's office, charged him with joining a terrorist group. Amnesty International describes that department as part of a parallel justice system that misuses counterterrorism laws to detain people for acts that should not be criminalised. "He was never politically active, never had any ideology. Just an ordinary kid dividing his time between school and online games," said one of his lawyers, who requested anonymity. Emad remains in detention.

PUBG – PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds – is an online survival game similar to Fortnite, in which players chat, form teams, and exchange virtual rewards such as weapons, gear, or in-game currency.

A Telegram link promising in-game

weapons led another 15-year-old into a group that was instead calling for protests. He left the group at once but was arrested the same day in July 2024.

Fearing that national security agents were monitoring their communications, his parents refused to share any details about his 17 months in pretrial detention. A family friend told to *The Continent* on condition of anonymity: "He knows nothing about politics yet was accused of spreading rumours and joining a banned group."

Cycle and recycle of harm

Fourteen Egyptian and international human rights groups describe arrests, disappearances, and terrorism charges without evidence relating to 12 other children. The groups, including the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Refugees Platform in Egypt and the World Organisation Against Torture, call for the children to be immediately released. They are often detained with adults, in violation of both Egyptian and international law.

"Every case follows the same script. Only the children's names, ages, and governorates differ. But the bait, the arrests, and the charges are nearly identical," said Sara Mohamed, who heads a programme against arbitrary detentions at the Middle East Democracy Centre.

Some of the children's families turned to the centre for legal assistance. They describe a similar pattern: children first encounter recruiters inside game chats, then are steered to Telegram

groups that pose as co-ordination hubs for play. From there, they are pushed toward small online tasks. “They were promised in-game rewards – extra followers or virtual currency – in exchange for posting certain content on TikTok or Facebook,” Mohamed said.

She said the children appeared to be victims of a systematic recruitment operation that manipulated them into posting political slogans, insults directed at Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, calls to open Gaza’s Rafah crossing, or other material Egyptian security interprets as extremist. Mohamed argues the Egyptian government should be protecting these children from online recruitment instead of detaining them.

In court, the cases against the children rest entirely on what national security investigators claim. “We are denied access to case files. How can we defend them without knowing the evidence?” said a lawyer representing one of the children.

In any case, many of the children have not yet faced trial. “Pretrial detention is extended for months – even over a year – often through electronic renewals without bringing them physically before a judge,” the lawyers said. The practice is so common in Egypt that it has a name: *tadweer* (“recycling”).

In August, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights Volker Türk called Egyptian authorities out



Git gud: Gamers are being recruited to criticise President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on social media.



PHOTO: AFP

Chicken dinner: Teens were reportedly recruited to call for the Rafah crossing to open for Gaza food aid.

on this practice, saying they are using it as a systematic tool against political detainees. As of June 2025, more than 60,000 political detainees were in prison without trial.

Opposition politician and former MP Ziad el-Elaimy spent two years in pretrial detention and almost a year in prison for “spreading false news” before being pardoned. He said the damage was doubled for children.

“They lack criminal intent, they are held illegally with adults, and their futures are being stolen. Detaining kids over games or opinions doesn’t make Egypt safer. It only sows more anger, distortion, and perhaps future violence.”

The gaming-linked cases are not the first example of Egyptian authorities failing to account for children’s rights in their operations. Between 2013 and

2019, in the crackdown on dissent that followed the Arab Spring protests, Egyptian authorities reportedly arrested and detained hundreds of children.

A 2020 Human Rights Watch report highlighted 20 cases of jailed children, 14 of whom said they had suffered torture in detention. In one case, a 17-year-old was sentenced to death – a ruling later commuted.

The Continent contacted Egypt’s National Security Agency and the PUBG development team for comment, but received no response.

El-Elaimy said Egypt’s entire security and legal strategy needed rethinking. “What we need is a ministry of interior and a public prosecution that work to build social peace – not merely to pursue people with detention and suspicion.” ■

INVESTIGATION

The Djiboutian massacre Ethiopia won't acknowledge

Djibouti drones killed eight people on the other side of its border with Ethiopia. Djibouti claimed they were terrorists. Ethiopia said nothing. This investigation found that some of the dead were Ethiopians, revealing another episode in Addis's tendency to let its neighbours kill its citizens with impunity.



Crossing the line: Djibouti's bombs landed inside Ethiopia, killing civilians – not armed fighters.

ZECHARIAS ZELELEM

On 30 January this year, a drone manned from Djibouti dropped a bomb on a funeral gathering in Siyaru, a remote, semi-arid village near the Ethiopia-Djibouti border. As rescuers rushed in, a second bomb dropped. And then a third.

At least eight people were killed,

including three children. Several others were injured. Given the village's remoteness, the incident might have gone unreported if graphic images of the dead hadn't spread across Ethiopian social media.

A statement from the Djibouti's defence ministry said the drone struck rebel fighters from the Front for the

Restoration of Unity and Democracy (Frud), a Djiboutian political party with a military wing. It has been fighting for Afar interests in Djibouti since the 1990s. The Afar are a community split by the colonial border separating Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea.

“Eight terrorists were neutralised on site,” said a Djibouti military statement. “Unfortunately, collateral damage among Djiboutian civilians in the area has been documented.”

International media, including *Voice of America*, *Agence France Presse*, and *Radio France Internationale* reported this version of events.

Now, new findings from an open-

source investigation by *The Continent* reveal a different reality.

The bombs landed inside Ethiopia, not in Djibouti, and civilians – not armed fighters – were killed. That distinction matters. It shows Ethiopia is once again tolerating a foreign military targeting its own citizens, as it did with Eritrea during the Tigray conflict.

A transparent lie

Even before the ink could dry on the Djiboutian military’s statement, *The Addis Standard* and human rights groups in Djibouti were emphatic that the strike had actually occurred inside Ethiopia’s Afar region. But Alexis Mohamed, an adviser to Djiboutian President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, rubbished these reports in now-deleted social media posts.

The Continent got to work to figure out what really happened. Over the course of eight months, we collected eyewitness testimonies, interviewed human rights activists in Ethiopia and Djibouti, and examined images and footage from the strike. Our findings align with those of Djiboutian activists, who pinpointed Siyaru in Ethiopia’s Afar region as the site of the strike.

The ammunition residue found on the night of the strike confirms the bomb was manufactured by Roketsan, a state-run weapons manufacturer in Türkiye. Former US army explosives expert Trevor Ball identified them as remnants of the laser guided MAM-L bomb. These explosives are usually paired with drones, which have been linked to massacres across Africa, including a



In recovery: Mariam Mohammed Abdullah was injured in the drone strike.

2022 strike in Oromia, Ethiopia, which killed 80 civilians. That same year, Djibouti's independence day parade showcased Bayraktar TB2 drones armed with Roketsan rockets.

Our investigation pinpoints the exact strike location: less than 2km into Ethiopian territory. The bombs landed on mountainous terrain 36km southwest of a border crossing on the RN1 highway that connects Ethiopia to Djibouti.

"It was late in the evening, and the men were outside at a funeral," said Mariam Mohammed Abdullah, 38, a mother of eight. "Suddenly, we heard screams. We ran out of our homes to help. I remember seeing the dead and injured. Then I was hit."

The victims, Mohammed Abdullah said, were nationals of both Ethiopia and Djibouti, related to each other through Afar family and clan ties.

"Suddenly, we heard screams. We ran out of our homes to help. I remember seeing the dead and injured. Then I was hit."

Mohamed Kadamy, the president of Frud, said no fighters from the group were harmed in the strike. "Our fighters were nowhere near the [January 30] massacre when it happened," Kadamy told *The Continent*. "We know the area. It is a neglected region by both Ethiopia and Djibouti and is severely underdeveloped... They targeted long-



Left in the lurch: The father of two of the drone strike's victims speaks on camera after the attack.

suffering civilians, not soldiers."

"It was a massacre of innocent nomads," said Omar Ali Ewado of the Djiboutian League for Human Rights.

Politics over people

The January drone strike left Afar families grieving not only for lost lives, but for the recognition of that loss – and feeling neglected by all three countries they reside in. Addis Ababa offered no protest against the killing of its own nationals, even as France, which manages Djibouti's airspace, faced questions in its Parliament.

In December 2024 – just weeks before the massacre – Djiboutian intelligence officials met their Ethiopian counterparts in Addis Ababa. A joint task force was set up to tackle "cross-border anti-peace activities", which rights groups say meant giving Djibouti access to Ethiopian airspace to target Frud militants.

Since then, Djibouti has launched three drone strikes inside Ethiopia: one with no casualties, another in December



Telltale: A screengrab from Djibouti's state broadcaster of a parade showing a Bayraktar TB2 drone with the Roketsan logo, circled in red.

that killed two Afar pastoralists, and the latest – the Siyaru drone strike.

Sultan Ahmed Alimirah, the traditional leader of the Afar, is the only high-ranking Ethiopian to condemn the killing of civilians. He described the Siyaru strike as a “deliberate and calculated massacre against defenceless, indigenous Afars”.

Despite their Afar roots, Ethiopian Defence Minister Aisha Mohammed Mussa and Awol Arba, the Afar regional president, have remained silent.

The tacit approval of the strikes in Afar echoes the dynamic of the 2020-21 war in Tigray when the Ethiopian government allowed Eritrea to enter its territory to fight an old enemy of Asmara: the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

This pattern of foreign powers being allowed to operate inside Ethiopian borders raises questions about sovereignty, accountability, and whose lives the states choose to protect.

It's not only the regional actors who chose silence on the Siyaru strike.

France controls the surveillance

of Djiboutian airspace, putting it in position to shed more light on what happened on 30 January.

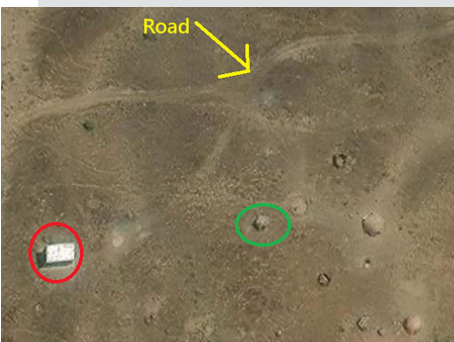
But Paris offered no insight, triggering demands for more scrutiny of the Djibouti-France defence agreement when officials attempted to fast-track its ratification by the French parliament. Despite initial opposition, the French senate eventually ratified it in June.

The renewable agreement has allowed France to keep a permanent military base in Djibouti since the latter's independence in 1977. Djibouti, which is located at a strategic trade gateway in the Gulf of Aden, also hosts United States, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and other military bases.

The Continent asked ministers and officials in the Ethiopian, Djiboutian, and French governments to comment on the findings of this investigation but received no response. We also asked the officials of the named Türkiye arms companies for comment but they too did not respond.

In Siyaru, the geopolitical machinations of heavily militarised Djibouti feel distant. But the terror of their actions and omissions is intimate and suffocating.

“We just want to raise our children and care for our cattle without being bombed,” Abdullah told *The Continent*. “Now even when vultures fly past, children panic and flee because they think it's a drone. As a result the goats they are herding get lost. Even adults no longer sleep properly at night. We live in fear.”

**Above:**

Various screenshots of video clip stitched together to help geolocate and identify locations where bodies were found

Left: *Apple Maps satellite imagery of structures and road seen in image 11 and identified with red, green and yellow markings*

GEOLOCATING A MASSACRE

To confirm the strike location, *The Continent* combined testimony, video evidence, and satellite analysis.

Four Siyaru residents described nearby landmarks: Mount Dîdâlelé in Djibouti, Mount Mousa Ali at the Ethiopia-Eritrea-Djibouti border, and smaller peaks in-between. Phone footage filmed the day after the attack showed families collecting a body for burial and a grieving father recounting the loss of his two sons. Four eyewitnesses and three other people familiar with the area confirmed the video was recorded at the massacre site.

Eyewitnesses said the strike occurred between a school and the foot of a mountain. Using commercial satellite imagery, *The Continent* canvassed the terrain for matching structures and dirt

roads. By stitching frames from the 25-second video, we reconstructed the layout: a dirt track leading to a low structure, with a distinctive mountain ridge in the background.

Topography tool PeakVisor helped to identify those ridges. Analysis showed a strong match with mountains “east of Mount Dîdâlelé” in Ethiopian territory. Multiple peaks visible in the video – including Mount Sasakle, 8km inside Djibouti – aligned with the skyline from the Siyaru side of the border.

Taken together, this evidence allowed *The Continent* to geolocate the site at 11°58'55.72"N, 42°3'13.33"E – 1.5km inside Ethiopia, and 8km from where Djiboutian officials say the strike occurred. This is where relatives were filmed recovering remains the next day.

The findings contradict Djibouti's claim that the strike took place on its soil and show the drone attack happened within Ethiopia's borders. Ethiopia's government, however, is continuing to look away. ■

FEATURE

Gukurahundi's horrors obscured by 'dignity'

Zimbabwe is once again trying to reach for reconciliation and healing, but authorities don't want anyone looking too closely.



ALL PHOTOS: ZINYANGE AUTONY

Disappeared: Velile Hlongwane was taken by soldiers during Gukurahundi in January 1985.

TENDAI MARIMA IN SILOBELA

ON THE night of 30 January 1985, Anna Ndebele's husband Cephas was taken in for questioning by state agents in Silobela, in Zimbabwe's Midlands province, along with 10 other men. They were never seen again. Thirty years later, the 74-year-old still doesn't know where the remains of her husband lie.

Some 20,000 civilians were killed in the Gukurahundi massacres from 1983 to 1987. Families like Ndebele's have

lived in limbo, waiting to learn what really happened to their loved ones.

The Gukurahundi massacres stemmed from divisions of the Second Chimurenga, or Zimbabwe's war for independence.

This conflict saw Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) and Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu) vie for power as both groups fought the white minority government.

After independence, Mugabe branded

***Clockwise from top:***

Families of Gukurahundi victims gather with flowers at a torture and murder site.

Patricia Dlamini, 50, poses for a portrait inside her single room house in Mzilikazi township, Bulawayo.

A photograph of Clement Baleni, a school teacher who was taken from his home at night.



Zapu supporters as “dissidents”. In 1983, he deployed the North Korea-trained 5th Brigade of the army to Matabeleland and the Midlands, home to the Ndebele and Kalanga ethnic groups.

Thousands of people were “disappeared”, tortured, raped, or executed. Mugabe later flippantly called the Gukurahundi (Shona for “the early cleansing rains”) campaign a “moment of madness”.

Today, community hearings are being held to document civilian experiences from that time. Nearly 10,000 testimonies have been recorded. But the hearings are happening behind closed doors – with media, civil society, and many survivors excluded.

So far, they have been confined to Matabeleland even though atrocities also took place in the Midlands.

Ndebele says she holds little regard for the hearings anyway – and has only one request. “We don’t want much: we want the bones of our husbands so we can hold them in our hands. If there’s anything else to be done, it can come afterwards – we don’t really care,” she says. “But we want to know where these people went. We want their bones.”

A 1995 court order declared the Silobela Eleven presumed dead.

For Ndebele, grief for her missing husband was compounded by the death of her 11-year-old son, Paris, who was taken with the men and returned

the next morning crying, bruised, and disoriented. He died soon afterwards.

Later, five soldiers attempted to sexually assault her. “I screamed so loud they told me to keep quiet, but I couldn’t,” she says. “They had taken my husband, killed my son, and now they wanted to rape me. These were gangsters, not soldiers.”

Every year, families gather to remember the Silobela Eleven on 30 January, the day they disappeared, or 30 August, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. At the first memorial in 2021, a plaque was erected, only to be destroyed overnight by suspected state agents. A second plaque suffered the same fate. This year, flowers were laid on the rubble, as police interrogated villagers who had gathered.

The National Council of Chiefs, led by Chief Mtshane Khumalo, says the closed hearings are meant to protect the dignity and privacy of the survivors.

However, Mbuso Fuzwayo, head of Ibhetshu Likazulu, an advocacy group working with survivors, says the process is flawed. “There is no transparency and the fact that this is excluding other stakeholders is clearly a micromanaged process,” Fuzwayo tells *The Continent*. “It is not victim-centred.”

This is Zimbabwe’s third attempt at accountability for Gukurahundi. In the 1980s, Mugabe’s government established two commissions after the massacres, but both reports apparently vanished. A few officials were charged with torture, none successfully prosecuted, and one case ended in an



Gone: Hlongwane Lizwelinzima, 46, was just five when 5th Brigade soldiers dragged his father away.



Horrific: Boniface Gumbi, 78, was tortured by 5th Brigade soldiers, and his pregnant wife was raped.

out-of-court settlement.

Today, President Emmerson Mnangagwa frames the hearings as a national turning point, where “the scars of yesterday no longer fester, but become stepping stones to a stronger, more unified Zimbabwe.”

Forty-two years later, Patricia Dlamini, 50, still bears the scars of Gukurahundi. Her father, Alphion Bhelekwana Dlamini, was seized with other men on suspicion of aiding dissidents. Days later, his mutilated body was returned on a scotch cart, although the death



Clockwise from top left:
Poles from a mud hut stand at the Dlamini homestead which was set on fire by the 5th Brigade.

Remains of burnt plastics on a dress emerge from an eroded floor of a mud hut at the Dlamini homestead.

A bus laden with building materials and groceries passes through a village in Tsholotsho.

certificate falsely asserted that he had been killed by crossfire.

Days later, his mutilated body was returned on a scotch cart, although the death certificate falsely claimed he had been killed by crossfire.

A few months later, the 5th Brigade returned, forcing villagers to a meeting. At just eight years old, Dlamini was beaten for failing to reveal rebel movements. Families were assaulted,

livestock seized, and homes razed. The Dlaminis fled to Bulawayo, surviving on handouts from the Catholic Church.

With six children to support, her mother could not afford school fees, and Dlamini dropped out at 15. Now a housekeeper, she hopes today's hearings will bring what she wants most – an apology and then compensation.

"We expect [that] whatever they give to people must be followed with the words, 'I'm sorry,'" she says. "If they don't say sorry it will seem like the government is happy with what they did. Money won't be enough to say sorry to us." ■

FEATURE

Employment is resistance in Gaza

Remote-work platforms take root in Palestine as freelance tech and creative workers navigate the wartime economy.



PHOTO : OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP

Under siege: Living space is hard enough to find in Gaza – finding places to work can feel impossible.

ANSAM AL-KITTA IN GAZA CITY

FOR A full five months after the beginning of Israel's war in Gaza, engineer and programmer Sherif Naim had no income. "My laptop was in a bag for five months. I didn't open it once," Naim tells *The Continent*.

Before the war, about 12,000 people worked online in Gaza, unable to leave because of Israel's blockade. Most of

them stopped working altogether as war brought death, danger, electricity cuts, and internet blackouts.

"I was frustrated and depressed," Naim says. As the war dragged on, he pitched to pre-war clients until he was commissioned. But electricity cuts made productivity impossible. "So I raised \$2,500 to buy a solar panel, a battery, and an inverter."

Naim has three decades of work

experience and felt a responsibility to help others return to work like him. He contacted the Association of Engineers in Germany, which agreed to cover his rent for three months and the cost of a solar panel, allowing Naim to reassemble his old team of 10 to share his energy resources. Gaza City's Taqat ("energies" in Arabic) was born.

Taqat now has wartime co-working space for 700 freelancers across three branches in Gaza City, Deir al-Balah, and Nuseirat. Its expansion was supported by a Turkish innovation fund, the Arab-German Cultural Center, and the Bank of Palestine.

Naim says it has arranged 150 work contracts for young people in Gaza and many other freelancers use its resources to do work they find independently online or from old contacts.

Freelancer Asmaa Felfel says that Taqat turned her life around. Like many people in Gaza, she is a jack of many trades: copywriter, project manager, audio transcriber, and translator.

Before the war, she made enough to live in a large home in Gaza City with her family. In November 2023, she was forced to leave that home with nothing but her laptop and a kitten.

For three months, Felfel commuted from Nuseirat to Deir al-Balah, offering her services, but to no avail. Her family was living on her savings, which were running out.

In May 2024, Felfel caught a break. She was offered a report-writing gig that she worked on day and night but, minutes before delivery, an Israeli shell struck

next door. "I survived but I lost the job. I was back where I started."

Then a friend introduced her to Taqat. "I found myself in an office, breathing a small part of the life that was forcefully taken from me," Felfel says.

The success of initiatives like Taqat means Gaza's freelance workforce may actually have expanded during the war.

Salsabeel al-Bardawil, 25, began a similar project, Gaza Talents, about seven months into the war to avoid falling into depression after her sister was killed in an Israeli attack. It was the second one to hit her family. In January 2024, within a week of their displacement from Nuseirat to Rafah, an Israeli airstrike killed Al-Bardawil's husband and her only child.

She has poured her grief into Gaza Talents, a tech platform and hub that brings together employees, freelancers, and clients. Companies can post job and freelance gigs and the hub will match them to workers in Gaza. Workers create profiles to showcase their previous work and, when they're commissioned, Gaza Talents handles the financial transactions on their behalf.

"The platform also provides training for young talents who have skills but don't know how to market themselves," Al-Bardawil says. Twenty-four people have secured full-time remote jobs through Gaza Talents and the platform has handled 564 projects for clients outside Gaza. ■

This article is published in collaboration with Egab

DATA

Seychelles’ rising tide of drugs: Between a rock and atoll

SEYCHELLES may look like an island paradise but, according to its citizens, not everything is going swimmingly. As the country goes to the polls today (27 September), let’s take stock of the major concerns Seychellois want the government to address.

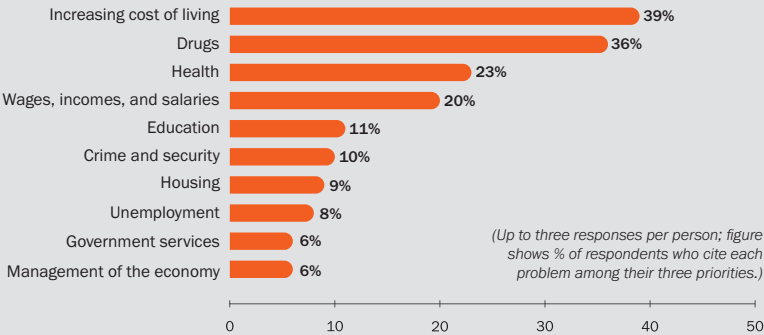
Four in 10 respondents (39%) cite the rising cost of living as the most important problem requiring intervention, closely followed by drugs (36%). At least one-fifth identify health (23%) and incomes (20%) as priorities.

How do citizens rate the government’s performance on these issues? Two-thirds

(66%) say it is performing poorly on keeping inflation in check, while nearly half give the government bad marks for its efforts to combat drug abuse (46%) and improve basic health services (45%).

The new government may find it hard to stem the tide on drugs: Fewer than four in 10 citizens trust “somewhat” or “a lot” that it can be done by the Coast Guard (39%), the Agency for Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation (35%), judges and magistrates (34%), customs officers (31%), the police (24%), prison guards (19%), or – last of the lot – politicians (19%). ■

Most important problems | Seychelles | 2025





BOOK REVIEW

BY JACQUELINE NYATHI



Victims of a terrorist insurgency talk back

So many stories of suffering in Africa are told by others; so few by the people living them. An oral history of people living through the Boko Haram conflict aims to correct this.

THE WORLD Was in Our Hands is an oral history of people affected by the Boko Haram conflict, comprising testimonies collected by Chitra Nagarajan from 2016 to 2021. It contains 47 interviews with “women, soldiers, farmers, and fishermen”; displaced people, some of them insiders; and those who experienced the violence, either directly or indirectly.

You can sense the sensitivity of Nagarajan, the author-researcher, in collecting these stories. Narrators relate their stories in their own languages and review what was recorded. The stories of women and girls are prioritised: from falling pregnant or being kidnapped, to missing years of school. The conflict’s effect on elder-youth dynamics is also highlighted, as is citizens’ relation to the state, often complicated by the perception that governments are corrupt or do not care about their people.

Nagarajan shows great insight in addressing the root causes of the conflict, a complex interplay of religion and an absent state. She records the rise of Boko Haram, from a separatist community founded in Yobe State in 2003 to the increasing popularity of its charismatic leader, Mohammed Yusuf, who government forces killed in 2009.

“After Yusuf’s killing, his group went underground, regrouped, and returned, calling itself Jama’atu Ahl al-Sunna li-l-Da’wa wa-l-Jihad, translated as

‘People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad’. The media named it Boko Haram in reference to one of its slogans,” Nagarajan writes.

The group became increasingly violent and more insular under the new leadership of Abubakar Shekau, indulging in a spree of violence that led to retaliation and reprisals from the government. The victims were frequently innocent people who refused to reveal what they knew about the group’s members. This was a factor in extending Boko Haram’s influence, ultimately leading to what has effectively been a civil war.

The victims were frequently innocent people who refused to reveal what they knew about the group’s members

As one of the affected people testifies: “If you identified them, they would kill you. If you didn’t identify them, soldiers would kill you. What were we supposed to do?”

People have suffered bereavement and families have been separated. Livelihoods have been ruined and people turned into beggars. Many people have been displaced – and then scorned for being refugees. Children have missed out on years of school. People have been displaced to camps, where they face food insecurity – yet are still relieved to be removed from the fighting.

Young women who were taken – some willingly, others against their will – speak of being Boko Haram “wives”.

“[I]t felt good to have this power after a lifetime of being told you had none because you were a girl. We wives could do anything we wanted, whatever it was.”

There are many stories from people who escaped Sambisa Forest where Boko Haram had its base. A mother tells of her grief at her son being willingly recruited; she talks about fleeing with her younger sons to protect them from the influence of the older boys, now insurgents. One woman talks about the many men she saved by hiding them in her home. Another tells how a woman protected her daughter from being kidnapped by burying her underground. We also hear from the daughter herself about that experience.

There are also stories from people resisting Boko Haram, including testimonies from LGBTQI+ people, already at risk in a conservative community, but particularly so under the influence of Boko Haram’s desired return to Sharia law. And there’s an arresting interview with a disgruntled Nigerian soldier.

What can one do in the face of war and death? If you’re in the midst of it, you do your best to survive. If you’re far from it, you try to bear witness. This book has stories of the former and enables readers to do the latter. *The World Was In Our Hands* is an important and rare record of the Boko Haram conflict from those who were, and are still, living through it. ■

The Quiz

- 1 Which country did Muammar Gaddafi lead from 1969 to 2011?
- 2 Mallawi is the name of a city in which country?
- 3 How many Ecowas states are there: 12, 14 or 16?
- 4 Who is the president of the DRC?
- 5 In which country did the Gukurahundi massacres occur?
- 6 "Pula" is the name of the currency of which country?
- 7 What is the name of Djibouti's capital city?
- 8 Which country did the Seychelles gain independence from in 1976?
- 9 Which African country is the largest exporter of gold?
- 10 Nyasa and Lago Niassa are alternate names for which lake (pictured)? Hint: It's named after a country.



HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

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

"If there are any freshwater herring in that lake then I bet they're highly educated. Or, you know, well read."

ANALYSIS

The dark side of the sparkling stones

Botswana may soon own the company that kept diamonds out of African hands.

DUNCAN MONEY

TO GAIN greater control over the diamonds that made it rich, Botswana wants to buy a majority stake in diamond company De Beers. President Duma Boko claimed this week that the deal will be done by the end of October to secure “economic sovereignty for Botswana”.

There is a supreme historical irony here. Control over diamonds is what made De Beers successful in the first place, but for a century it was enforced at the expense of African people.

The value of diamonds was always partly about their scarcity. Owning a large transparent stone that has no purpose beyond looking beautiful is one of the ultimate status symbols – unless everyone else has one too. To be valuable, diamonds have to be scarce.

Their scarcity, however, is not a natural phenomenon.

Diamonds were once genuinely scarce objects, but that changed with the 1871 discovery of an enormous deposit at a small hill in Kimberley, South Africa. In the ensuing rush, diggers gouged out the hill into a yawning pit known as the “Big Hole”, and flooded the market with

stones, depressing prices by the 1880s.

It was at this juncture that key players in the industry, including notorious imperialist Cecil Rhodes, had the insight that they could make more money by selling fewer diamonds. All they needed to boost the price was to control the supply. The newly founded company De Beers set about doing just that.

Over the following century the industry forcibly prevented people in West and southern Africa – where the greatest sources of natural stones were found – from mining and selling diamonds, to keep them scarce.

De Beers faced two challenges. The first is that diamonds are an ideal object to smuggle: small, lightweight, durable and, until recently, extremely valuable. Miners could make much more money keeping the stones themselves. In 1886, De Beers began forcing African miners to live in prison-like compounds. Miners moved under guard or through closed passages from the compound to the mine and were strip-searched on the way back. This compound system was soon imposed at other mines too.

The second challenge was that people kept discovering diamonds – elsewhere



De fuq? A diamond mine in 1888, around the time De Beers began locking up and strip-searching workers.

PHOTO: ROBERT HARRIS

in South Africa at first, then in Namibia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, and across West Africa. Each new source of supply was brought into this same system of control, either with De Beers taking over the mine or reaching agreements with other mining companies to restrict supply.

The level of control these companies exercised over their mines was extreme.

Miners, for their part, used homing pigeons, crossbows, hollowed-out Bibles, and fake glass eyes to try to smuggle diamonds out of the mines.

Things were different in West Africa, where diamonds were discovered in the 1920s in gravel beds near the surface, not deep underground. The industry adopted a different strategy: keeping people out, rather than keeping them in.

This entailed imposing harsh movement restrictions on communities

around new diamond mines in Ghana, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. In the latter, no one except a British diamond company, could legally mine or sell diamonds and there were regular mass expulsions from the area around the mines. The names given to these expulsions in the 1950s are telling: “Operation Parasite”, “Operation Stranger”, and “Operation Spring Clean”.

The diamond industry’s tactics changed only in the 1970s. Mining companies increasingly had to negotiate with independent countries, not colonies, and sources of diamonds outside the African continent became more important.

It is a great historic irony that a company first established to stop African miners gaining access to diamonds could become a symbol of African economic sovereignty. ■

Big Pic

Deep and dapper: An Isicathamiya group performs at a competition in Durban, South Africa. Isicathamiya – isiZulu for ‘to walk on tiptoes’ – is an acapella soulful, choral style developed by Zulu migrant workers.

PHOTO: RAJESH JANTILAL



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