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The Continent

Life in a city under siege

Dispatches from El Fasher





Cover: El Fasher, the capital of Sudan's North Darfur province, is no stranger to conflict. Its residents witnessed the Darfur Genocide, and many did not survive. Now, the city is being pummelled by artillery and aerial attacks, and has been surrounded by fighters aligned with the Rapid Support Forces – a brutal paramilitary group fighting to control the country. In this week's newspaper (p13), two residents describe their daily lives. Food is running out. Medicine is running out. The bombs keep dropping. And then came the floods.

Inside:

- **Tanzania:** Opposition politician murdered (p7)
- **Zambia:** The lights are going out (p8)
- **Gaza:** The African states fuelling war crimes (p11)
- **Morocco:** A year after the massive quake (p17)
- **Lesotho:** The gangster musicians are winning (p19)
- **Photos:** The brass-roots Ugandan bands marching to their own beat (p22)

See you a bit later than usual

Every 10 editions, *The Continent* takes a brief publication break to recharge our batteries (and our finances). Don't worry, we will catch you up on all the important African and international news when we return on Saturday 12 October. In the meantime, please tell your friends, family and colleagues to [subscribe](#) (for free!) to Africa's best independent newspaper – and, if you can, help us to do more independent journalism by [donating](#).



CLIMATE

British Petroleum to pay for its eco crimes in South Africa

The Pretoria High Court has ordered BP to pay R53-million (nearly \$3-million) in fines for building and expanding 21 fuel stations in South Africa in 2000 without environmental approval. The fine adds to the headaches for the BP operation in South Africa. In another court loss in January, a South African judge rebuffed an attempt by BP to get a R224-million (\$12.6-million) refund from the tax collector, after it falsely claimed that some of the fuel it was taxed for, was ultimately sold in Zimbabwe.

KENYA

Nairobi airport staff strike over 'key asset' takeover plan

A strike by staff at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport grounded flights on Tuesday and Wednesday. By Thursday, normal service had resumed – but the issue behind the strike is far from resolved. Staff are concerned about the state's plan to lease the airport to Adani, a major Indian conglomerate, for 30 years, questioning the wisdom of outsourcing the running of a key national asset. Adani itself has also been repeatedly implicated in major corruption scandals all over the world.

MEXICO

Controversial judiciary overhaul set to go ahead

A vote to overhaul Mexico's judiciary was paused on Tuesday after hundreds

of protesters stormed the Senate. The governing Morena party eventually got the final two-thirds majority needed to approve the bill, which will see judges elected by popular vote, a big win for outgoing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. Critics fear making judges stand for election will politicise the judiciary.



EUROPEAN UNION

'Are... are we the baddies?'

Last year, the European Union signed a billion-dollar deal with Tunisia's autocratic president Kais Saied to keep migrants out of Europe. This came after Saied had changed the Constitution and locked up opponents to stay in power. Only now is the EU, which publicly champions human rights and democracy, acknowledging the hypocrisy. An internal EU document, seen by *The Guardian*, worries the deal may damage "the EU's credibility". Quite. But the damage is already done.

NIGERIA

Fuel tanker crashes into truck, killing 48

At least 48 people died on Sunday in yet another fuel tanker explosion. The tanker collided head-on with another truck on Sunday in the Agaie area of the north-central Niger State. It was reportedly also carrying livestock. As previously reported in *The Continent*, because vandalism forced oil out of Nigeria's pipeline network, much of it is now transported by road on tankers. This has led to at least 200 tanker explosions since 2018, injuring or killing at least 800 people.



Monumental loss: The Zinder Grand Mosque in Niger has been destroyed by the heavy rains flooding the Sahel.

NIGER

Floods collapse historic Grand Mosque in Zinder

Torrential rains significantly damaged one of Niger's best known historical buildings, the Zinder Grand Mosque, according to videos on social media. One resident told the *AFP* news agency that it has been "wiped off the map." The iconic mosque was built in the mid-1800s and has been Niger's second-most visited tourism site after the Grand Mosque in Agadez. Both Mali and Niger are appealing for international aid to deal with the impacts of massive Sahel flooding. But the putschists running the countries have also burnt many diplomatic bridges in the recent past.

SOUTH AFRICA

Anti-apartheid hero Pravin Gordhan dies

Pravin Gordhan twice played a key role in saving South African democracy. First, he helped to negotiate the end of apartheid in the early 1990s. Then, in 2015, he became finance minister during the corrupt tenure of president Jacob Zuma, and used his authority to prevent the worst excesses of "state capture". He died on Friday after a short battle with cancer, at the age of 75. "South Africa has lost one of its finest servants," said the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

ALGERIA

Tebboune wins re-election amid magical maths

Algeria's military-backed president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, secured a second term with 94.7% of the vote in Saturday's elections. But something about the electoral maths is off. By 5pm on Saturday, the Algeria National Independent Authority for Elections was reporting 26.5% voter turnout – but by 8pm this had inexplicably risen to 48%. On Sunday, the electoral body said 5.6-million Algerians out of 24-million had voted, nowhere close to 48%. Tebboune's rivals, Abdelali Hassani Cherif and Youcef Aouchiche, are challenging the results in court.

CRIME

Man who killed Ugandan Olympian is now dead, too

Dickson Ndiema, the man who robbed the world of Ugandan Olympian Rebecca Cheptegei, died early this week from self-inflicted injury. Ndiema sneaked into Cheptegei's home in western Kenya, doused her with petrol and set a fire that also injured him. She died last week from burns that covered 80% of her body. Domestic violence has claimed the lives of several women athletes in Kenya, perpetrated by intimate partners who sought to control their wealth.

ANGOLA

Yearlong judicial travesty against activists continues

It's been a year since Angolan authorities summarily tried four people over their solidarity with protesters and sentenced them to years in prison. Amnesty International says that prison authorities have since denied three of the activists medical attention. Media worker Adolfo Campos is reportedly losing his eyesight, musician Gilson Morreira (aka Tanaice Neutro) needs surgery while 27-year-old youth activist Hermenegildo Victor José needs a wheelchair and a prosthesis.



Cruel harvest: Russia's war on Ukraine has prevented millions of tonnes of grain from reaching the world. Photo: Alexey Furman/Getty Images

FOOD

Russia targets Egypt's food supply

A Russian missile destroyed a cargo ship in the Black Sea on Thursday, according

to Ukrainian authorities. The ship was in Romania's exclusive economic zone, carrying Ukrainian wheat to Egypt, which relies on imported grain to feed its population. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has disrupted global supply chains and contributed to increases in staple prices.

Tanzania

Missing politician found dead

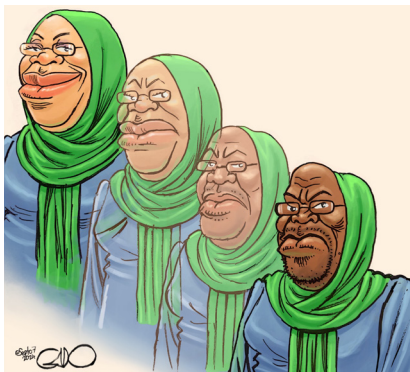
Kiri Rupiah

A Tanzanian opposition politician who was abducted last weekend was later found dead. Ali Mohamed Kibao's abduction and murder has vindicated opposition politicians in Tanzania who say the country is sliding back into authoritarianism.

Kibao, a former military intelligence officer, was a member of the secretariat of the opposition Chadema party. Last Friday he was forcibly removed from a bus leaving the city of Dar es Salaam by armed men, his party says. His body was found on Saturday.

Party chairman Freeman Mbowe told news agency *AFP* that an autopsy showed signs of a severe beating, and that Kibao's face had been doused in acid. "We cannot allow our people to continue disappearing or being killed like this," he said. "The lives of Chadema leaders are at risk."

Kibao's killing has drawn strong condemnation across the East African country, which is set to vote for a new president in 2025. President Samia Suluhu



Old habits: Critics say Samia Suluhu Hassan is turning into her predecessor.

Hassan posted on X: "I have ordered investigative agencies to bring me detailed information about this terrible incident and others like this as soon as possible ... The government I lead does not tolerate such brutal acts."

Samia ascended to the highest office in Tanzania after the death of president John Magufuli in March 2021. The promise of her presidency began by lifting a ban on opposition rallies, but analysts worry her administration is falling back on some of Magufuli's more autocratic habits.

As reported in last week's issue of *The Continent*, abductions, arbitrary arrests, and the banning of opposition rallies are on the rise as Tanzania heads for local government elections in November, and the presidential election in 2025. ■

Zambia

No water, no power and soon no more food, either?

Almost all of the country's electricity comes from the hydroelectric power station on Kariba Dam. That dam is running dry.

Olga Manda in Lusaka

Pressure is mounting on President Hakainde Hichilema to declare Zambia's prolonged energy crisis a national emergency.

The country is suffering one of its worst droughts in two decades, which has adversely affected its power supply. Water levels in the mega Kariba Dam complex, Zambia's main energy source, plunged to just 7.68%. Even with strict rationing, Zambia has only eight weeks of power supply remaining before a total blackout.

The state-run power utility, Zesco, has rationed power through rolling cuts, also known as load-shedding. Initially, the cuts lasted eight hours a day; now it's 21 hours a day for most users.

Hichilema and his government have called on citizens and businesses to seek alternative energy sources, specifically solar, and even produce extra to sell back to the state company. But over 60% of the country's 20-million people are poor, and 48% live in extreme poverty, the latest government statistics show.

This poverty is being exacerbated by crop failure, also a result of the drought, which has left more than 10-million people facing acute hunger.

Zesco, for the first time in the country's 60-year history, recently announced plans to turn off the turbines at its Kariba North Bank Power Station later in September due to the depletion of usable water in the reservoir. Neighbouring Zimbabwe, which also generates electricity from the Kariba Dam power system, is facing similar challenges.

A national emergency

In practice, authorities are already operating in emergency mode. Zesco says it has bought 23 generators to place in the markets of the capital city Lusaka, so that a portion of the economy – food supply in particular – continues to function.

Hichilema's critics say he should declare a state of emergency.

New Heritage Party leader Chishala Kateka said declaring a national disaster would enable the country to mobilise and unlock financial, material and human



Dark tidings: With just three hours of electricity a day, Zambia is on the brink of another national disaster.

Photo: Zinyange Auntony/
Bloomberg via Getty Images

resources for dealing expeditiously with the electricity crisis.

If Hichilema does so, it will be the second national disaster he declares this year. In April, the president declared the drought a national disaster and launched an international aid appeal for the millions of people facing extreme hunger. With support from donors, the government expanded school feeding programs and reintroduced food for work and emergency cash transfer programs in the worst-hit districts.

But presiding over national disasters is not the message with which Hichilema won the presidency. He promised economic recovery. Declaring another disaster might be a bridge too far for his political brand.

He appears to understand the gravity of the situation. “We need to make energy available for irrigation to avoid an economic shutdown. An economic

shutdown means lesser growth, more difficulties,” the president told a visiting delegation from the World Bank on Thursday. “Our growth projections were that this year we were going to grow to four percent. But because of this variable, we are now talking about 2%. We don’t know where we will settle.”

The president has tried to draw attention to the role of climate change in creating the current disaster, in a push to get the World Bank to fast-track emergency finance for Zambia.

This finance would come from a bucket of funds that the lender calls the Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option. It allows member countries to get emergency loans in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

The country’s immediate future is riding on this request: given that Zambia is already in debt distress, it is unclear where else the money could come from. ■

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The Continent

Palestine

Three African countries are fuelling Israel's war

Together, Gabon, Nigeria and the Republic of Congo are the largest supplier of crude oil to Israel. Critics warn this may make them complicit in genocide.

Ilham Rawoot

Some 37% of Israel's crude oil is supplied by just three African states, according to new research by Oil Change International. Gabon provides 22% of Israel's crude supplies, followed by Nigeria (9%) and the Republic of Congo (6%).

These crude oil exports have continued even after International Court of Justice found in January that South Africa's case against Israel, if proven, could result in a ruling that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Israeli forces have killed more than 40,000 people in Gaza since the war began in October 2023, following the Hamas attack on Israel that killed over 1,200 people.

According to a legal opinion by Irene Pietropaoli, a senior fellow at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, fuel is essential to the activities of the Israeli armed forces, and states and firms that supply it "make an essential contribution to violations of international humanitarian law and genocidal acts against the Palestinians in Gaza."

"This research highlights a crucial disconnect between political rhetoric and economic action," said Lorne Stockman, the research director for Oil Change International, an advocacy organisation that tracks the activities of fossil fuel companies. "Some of these nations may publicly support Palestinian rights while their resources fuel the conflict."

In March, for example, Nigeria's foreign minister, Yusuf Tuggar, said: "There is no justification for the carnage that is going on in Gaza. It has to stop."

Yet Nigerian crude oil continues to flow into Israel, potentially powering the tanks and armoured personnel carriers that make the carnage possible.

Business over ethics

"Unfortunately, as with many states around the world, most African states separate business from politics, diplomacy, morality and ethics," commented Na'eem Jeenah, senior researcher at South Africa's Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection. "Unless



Business as usual: Oil from Gabon, Nigeria and the Republic of Congo is flowing into Israel, and may be fuelling its tanks and armoured vehicles. Photo: Jack Guez/AFP

there is firm and concrete pressure for them to stop doing business with génocidaires, they will not.”

Jeenah added: “And the African Union, while it occasionally issues strong statements criticising Israel’s actions, has taken no concrete action.”

Fadhel Kaboub, a Nairobi-based senior adviser at Power Shift Africa, said that contractual obligations may limit the options available to African governments. Many oil deals give fossil fuel companies the right to do what they want with the oil they extract, he explained.

The companies extracting this oil in Africa are Shell, TotalEnergies, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Eni, according to Clean Oil International.

“The AU is clear on its stance on

genocide but when it comes to economic leverage to support that stance, we don’t have it,” Kaboub said.

“And the African Union, while it occasionally issues strong statements criticising Israel’s actions, has taken no concrete action.”

“Economically and geopolitically we are at the bottom of the hierarchy, playing the same roles today as during colonisation,” he said. “This takes away a lot of your sovereignty.”

The governments of Gabon, Nigeria and the Republic of Congo did not respond to *The Continent’s* requests for comment. ■

'We are living through the siege of El Fasher'

The city of El Fasher, in Sudan's northern Darfur region, has little strategic military importance. When war broke out in April last year, it was not a priority target for the paramilitary group which is fighting the Sudanese Armed Forces for supremacy. That group is known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and is led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, more commonly known by his nickname "Hemedti".

But El Fasher is important for another, more symbolic reason: the otherwise diverse city is located in the ancestral lands of black Darfuri communities. Taking it is psychologically important to the paramilitary group that sees itself as representing the "Arab tribes".

In May this year, the RSF laid siege to El Fasher. Access in and out is heavily restricted, and buildings are regularly shelled by artillery or bombed from the air. Hemedti's fighters have yet to seize control of the city, facing resistance from both the Sudanese army and volunteers who have chosen to fight.

The months-long siege has been horrific for the city's civilian population of about 1.5-million, around half of whom are internally displaced people from elsewhere in Darfur. Some fled to El Fasher, seeking safety there during the first year of the war; others had found refuge in

the city during a previous conflict, from 2003-2005, in which black Darfuris were systematically targeted. This is sometimes described as the "Darfur Genocide". It was perpetrated by members of the Janjaweed, a paramilitary group which evolved into today's RSF.

In addition to the conflict, El Fasher residents are now dealing with widespread flooding, which has washed away roads and destroyed shelters for displaced people. Aerial bombings from planes and drones continued unabated and, after a lull forced by the floods, ground fighting resumed this week, with RSF taking the nearly empty Al Salam IDP camp.

Access in and out is heavily restricted, and buildings are regularly shelled by artillery or bombed from the air.

Food and medicines, already scarce, are even scarcer now – and more expensive. Civilians in El Fasher are not sure how much longer they can survive. Until the siege is lifted, they have nowhere to go – and they are not sure that anyone is even aware of their plight.

In *The Continent* this week, two civilians take us through their daily life. These messages, sent via video and translated from Arabic, are distress signals. ■



Alhamdulillah, but we have lived through difficult days

Bismillah, prayer and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah.

I am Mugahid Alnour Ali from El Fasher in North Darfur State of Sudan.

We have lived the most difficult and horrible days in the past months. Conflict in El Fasher intensified on 9 May 2024. Since then, we haven't calmed down. Honestly, at any moment, I expect that I'm going to lose part of my body, or even my life and even my loved ones, to random shelling by Rapid Support Forces within residential neighbourhoods, hospitals, shelters and assembly areas such as markets. Life is very, very difficult. Alhamdulillah, but we have lived through very difficult days. We ask God for safety and wellness.

The siege imposed by Rapid Support on the city of El Fasher has increased the prices of consumer commodities and medicine. No commodity or drugs come from outside. We just rely on the state's strategic inventory – but it's about to run out. Traders' stores are about to run out. We expect the next few days to be catastrophic for us because, even now, most or all households have gone from two meals or three meals a day to just one. Even this one meal is not often complete – you find it made up of only lentils. Life is very difficult. We ask God for safety and wellness.

Three weeks ago, the price of a 50kg bag of sugar in El Fasher was 170,000

Sudanese pounds, but today it is 400,000 (\$665). The 25kg bag of flour was about 55,000 three weeks ago, and today it is 140,000. A pack of pasta was 33,000 and is 95,000 today. A bag of charcoal was 12,000, went to 18,000 and is now 50,000.

All this, with no sources of income for the residents of El Fasher. Because of the shelling, no one can move; everyone hides themselves with their children inside the trenches. If the blockade imposed by Rapid Support does not end, if no commodities enter from outside El Fasher, we will expect life in the town to be catastrophic. We ask God for safety and wellness.

I appeal to all our allies abroad to support youth initiatives because they are the most active entities that have been working to assist and support the shelters and hospitals. Let me take this opportunity to thank the youth initiators and emergency rooms of El Fasher, in all their names, and the resilient national and international organisations located at the town level which continue to provide services to the displaced. Even though there is a very large gap that even the youth initiatives and these organisations cannot fill, they do their best. Greetings to them.

I appeal to all the allies and international organisations outside: Start moving to find solutions for the people of El Fasher. I hope that there will be a glimmer of hope from all organisations and all youth initiatives at the level of the diaspora and African countries.



Destroyed: A livestock market in El Fasher, the capital of Sudan's North Darfur state, lies in ashes after being burned to the ground by the Rapid Support Forces commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. Photo: AFP

Will you stand, or lose us?

My name is Iman. I am in El Fasher.

Life in the past months has been horror, anxiety and fear. At every moment we expected to lose our lives. Every moment we felt that it was our last day of life because of the tragedies we were forced to endure: bombing, loss of relatives and neighbours, repeated displacement and fear that our end would be much worse than the experiences we were witnessing. These things all make us feel like there's no continuity in life for us.

If the war continues, our destiny is unknown. Our ongoing journey is of displacement. All the essentials of life are no longer. There is no possibility of going back to our homes and there is no possibility of going back to our past life – a stable life, a safe life, free of the sound of the weapons, free of all the tragedies and horrors we experienced. Will you stand, or lose us?

The thing we want most from the allies abroad is to stop the war. For us, the cessation of the war is the end of all the tragedies and atrocities that we have been forced to endure. It will be a guarantee of the continuity of our lives, a guarantee of our movement in peace to avoid the daily suffering of people and of the fate of the unknown, to ensure that we will be able to provide basic needs for ourselves, a guarantee of all the beautiful things that can happen.

In addition, assist on the humanitarian side.

The situation in conflict zones is very difficult. Displaced families and all people suffer so much. Some cannot get a single meal. There isn't enough food because all the people are not working and most people have lost their sources of income.

All the people who are jobless sitting at homes cannot secure meals. Children are hungry and most of them are malnourished. All require help from others in this issue and other issues like health. Hospitals are out of service and drugs are very few. All these need an intervention to rescue and save lives.





Photo: AFP

‘How can we rebuild?’

Survivors of last year’s deadly earthquake in Morocco are still waiting for the government to deliver on its big reconstruction pledge.

Malika Akestour in Al Haouz

Last September, Morocco was rocked by an earthquake so strong, it was felt as far away as Spain. The 6.8-magnitude quake, the strongest ever recorded in the country, killed more than 2,900 and injured over 5,500 people, and damaged at least 59,438 buildings. The people who survived are still freezing or burning in tented shelters, a year on.

The epicentre was Al Haouz, a province of farming villages that run along the rugged terrain of the High Atlas Mountains. In the traditional Amazigh village of Tansghart, cracks tore through

the walls of the hillside homes built of mud-brick, stones and rough wooden beams, and the minarets of two mosques in the village collapsed.

That day was a “catastrophe in every sense of the word,” said Tansghart resident Montasser Itri. It’s etched into his memory as the “stench of death, the loss of family and neighbours, and shock”. In mere seconds, the village’s unique Amazigh architecture was disfigured forever.

In public speeches after the disaster, Morocco’s Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch emphasised reconstruction as a government priority, and King Mohammed VI pledged to compensate

families and rebuild destroyed homes, schools, health facilities and roads.

So far, 57,000 beneficiaries have each been given 20,000 dirhams (\$2,000) to rebuild their homes, according to Akhannouch's office, meaning that even by the government's own count, the owners of nearly 2,500 damaged buildings have not yet received this support.

On the ground, many of the worst-hit parts of the country are still in tatters. Thousands of people without homes live in crude plastic tents along the hillsides, in which they battled the winter chill and then the harsh summer heat.

"The pace of rebuilding the collapsed houses is agonisingly slow," says Mohamed Ait M'barek, a 34-year-old resident of Tlat Niaqoub, a town near the epicentre.

The earthquake destroyed Tlat Niaqoub's only health facility. Nowadays the village relies on a single ambulance to transport patients to a hospital in Marrakesh, 100km away. The vehicle does not even have an oxygen tank. The quake also damaged the middle and high schools in the area, pushing children to take up schooling in nearby cities.

In the village of Ijoukak, a site so perilously close to the epicentre that every home was destroyed, Fatima Zoubair, a 27-year-old CorpsAfrica volunteer, has been helping families that survived the quake. She said that, between Ijaoukak and the nearby village of Iguidi, 150 families are still in tents and "most of them are not suitable for living".

The family of 18-year-old Aicha Id Massoud is one of them. Each morning her family cooks all of their meals in one

go, before the rising sun makes the kitchen too hot to enter. "The heat is so extreme that it's almost unbearable," she said.

But the shelter Massoud shares with her parents and four siblings is still an improvement on what the government provided. They had to buy reeds and wood to build their own makeshift shelters and cover them in plastic because the tents provided were "foul-smelling and caused illnesses among the children", she said. "Even with the plastic, rain still leaks in, and we have to disconnect the electricity to prevent electrical issues and short circuits, especially during the winter."

From Massoud's family shelters, the nearest water source is a 200m walk away and its water is dirty. "If you pour the water into a glass, you'll see mud settling at the bottom," said Massoud. "But we have no other option but to drink it."

Local officials say reconstruction efforts have been slowed by all sorts of snags. Amine Ait Manssour, who leads a local humanitarian group, said the initial demolition process was held up for lack of financing. Costs then skyrocketed due to the mountainous terrain and inflation in the price of building materials. And local factories simply don't have the capacity to produce enough materials, leading to further delays.

But the survivors are losing patience.

"The indifference, negligence, and failure to implement the royal statement from September of last year leads us to feel pessimistic, to be honest," said Itri. ■

Killer musicians are ripping Lesotho apart

The murder of a journalist by gangster accordion players highlights the fragile security situation here – and the government’s feeble response.

Tšoloane Mohlomi

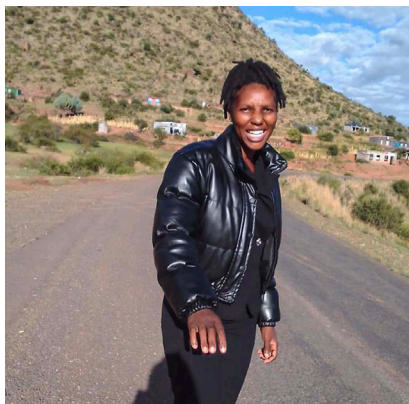
In late July, popular radio journalist Pulane Macheli died in a hail of bullets in Lesotho’s capital Maseru.

Macheli was mediating between rival groups of musicians commonly referred to as famo gangs. She died in the company of famo star Khopolo Kholue, commonly known as Lisuoa, who was likely the assailants’ target.

The tragedy is only the latest in the musical turf wars that escalated into one of the biggest threats to personal safety in Lesotho.

So many killings across the kingdom have been attributed to these gangs, that the government issued a gazette notice in May, declaring their existence unlawful. But the groups argue that they are civic societies with as much freedom of association as any other.

Famo is an accordion-based Sesotho music genre popular in both Lesotho and South Africa. Through song lyrics that disparage each other, a section of the musicians making this music have over the years created and nursed feuds that sometimes escalate into bloody gunfights.



Murdered: Pulane Macheli was mediating between rival musician gangs when she was gunned down in Maseru.

In 2022, when Lesotho climbed to the unenviable number one position in Africa for homicide, famo gangs were seen as a major contributing factor.

Initial feuds appeared to be over the music market. “They vie for control in their areas of operation and become jealous if any group’s music becomes more popular than the other’s in their respective turfs,” *Lesotho Times* reported in April.

But rogue national security agents reportedly entered the fray, escalating



Hail of bullets: Onlookers watch a forensic pathologist inspect a crime scene where 14 people were shot dead in a tavern. Photo: Emmanuel Croset/AFP

the violence. In a rare media interview in April, Tšepiso “Mosotho” Radebe who leads the Terene ea Khosi Mokata gang called on the office of Prime Minister Sam Matekane to remove members of the police, army and spy agencies from famo groups.

He did not specify how they were part of or influencing the gangs.

Other reports suggest security officials are the weapon suppliers, often doing this by stealing guns from government armouries to sell them to famo gangs.

At least two thefts were reportedly intended to benefit famo gangs: a 2021 heist in which 75 firearms were taken from the Mafeteng police station, 80km south of Maseru, and the theft of two AK47 rifles by members of the police Special Operations Unit last year.

Whatever the source of their weapons, famo gangs are well enough armed that they have gone from music turf wars to working as guns for hire.

In one particularly shocking incident, in broad daylight, suspected famo gang members gunned down two men who were having lunch at The Deck restaurant in Maseru: funeral home owner Ikheteleng Matabane and accountant Tšoana Molefe Khetheleng, who was investigating a 10-million maloti (\$554,000) alleged fraud at the former’s company.

That happened in February 2023. Months later, in June 2023, journalist Ralikonelo Joki’s car was sprayed with bullets, killing him. He had previously received death threats for reporting on issues such as government corruption.

Armed gangs available to kill anyone's real or perceived enemies have had serious repercussions across Lesotho, including that many media figures now self-censor to keep themselves safe. The government gazetted legislation banning famo gangs and introduced lengthier sentences for murder earlier this year, but little has changed.

And the murders know no borders.

Shortly after the ban three people were shot and killed at a South African farm allegedly belonging to "Mosotho", the famo gang leader who had claimed that the government's own security officers were fuelling the violence.

Shortly afterwards, four family members, including a nine-year-old child, were shot dead at a homestead belonging to a Community Policing Forum member in Lesotho's eastern district of Mokhotlong. The assailants were suspected to be famo contract killers.

A suspected famo gangster was also killed by unknown gunmen after disembarking a taxi from Johannesburg at the Lesotho-South Africa border.

As the July 2024 murder of Macheli shows, even attempts to peacefully mediate and end famo killings are met with more violence.

"My husband was killed in cold blood only because one famo group accused him of being biased during a mediation," a widow who didn't want to be named told *The Continent*. Her husband worked in law enforcement. "These groups never accept outcomes against their favour. They're lawless murderers who have little regard for human life."



Music kills: Lesotho soldiers stand guard next to a South African police car in Maseru. Photo: Hlompho Letsielo/AFP

These tragedies reveal two truths about life in Lesotho.

First, in areas such as the Mafeteng district, the escalating violence between famo factions has gotten out of control and undermines basic law and order.

Second, the legal system is failing and actually facilitating the attacks – as well as violence against journalists.

Rather than ensuring that the accused are quickly locked up and prosecuted, victims' friends and families are often enraged to see perpetrators back walking the streets just days later.

One reason for this is that the country's judicial process is slow. Another is that bail for a murder charge is set at the insultingly low level of just \$28.

This encourages further revenge attacks and so the cycle of violence continues. ■

Tšoloane Mohlomi is a freelance journalist and researcher in Lesotho. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

PHOTO ESSAY

Brass roots

In some places, sporting talent is the best shot at a rags-to-riches story for children born in poverty. In Uganda's capital, Kampala, music is a better bet.

Musical fame helped Bobi Wine go from a singing "Ghetto President" to leader of Uganda's political opposition.

Eddy Kenzo, who sang himself off the streets, was recently – if controversially – appointed "senior presidential adviser on creatives".

And by singing in the world-famous

Watoto Choir, the city's orphaned children have earned millions of dollars to support themselves and other orphans around the city.

And let's not forget Brass for Africa, who are also active in Liberia and Rwanda, and their efforts to keep the tradition of transformative music going for a new generation of Kampala's kids while making sure they have a blast.

Photos: Luis Tato/AFP



Don't be flat, play B-flat: Brass for Africa musicians tune up before setting out on a parade through the Bwaise informal settlement in Kampala.



Back from the brink: Steven Mayanja of Brass for Africa restores old bugles, flugels, trumpets, horns, trombones and this tuba by hand at his workshop in Kampala. Possibly even the odd euphonium, should the occasion merit it.



Bass of operations: Lower brass players rehearse ahead of a gig. The organisation's community bands offer young disadvantaged Ugandans opportunities that can genuinely transform their lives.



Setting a high bar: Young brass players take a break during a peripatetic practice ahead of their Bwaise parade.



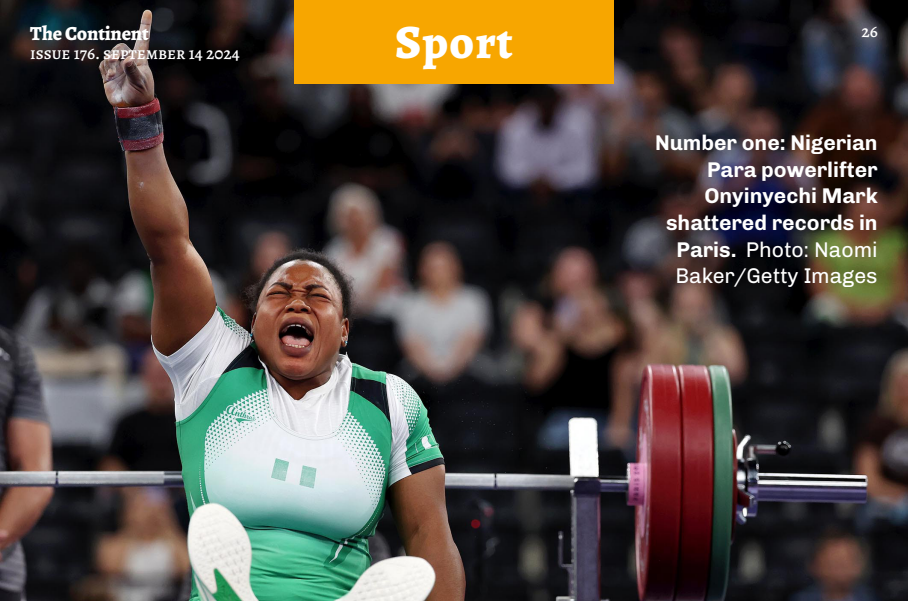
To their own beat: The Brass for Africa musicians strike up a march as they parade through Bwaise's dusty streets.



T-bone stakes: Trombonists slide into a break during a sectional practice ahead of a performance in Kampala. The doggies aren't in the band. Don't have the embouchure for it, if we're being honest.



Stand and deliver: These dandy highway musicians – we're not too scared to mention – don't need to spend their cash on looking flash, but are adamantly grabbing our attention.



Number one: Nigerian
Para powerlifter
Onyinyechi Mark
shattered records in
Paris. Photo: Naomi
Baker/Getty Images

It's a wrap for the Paralympics – and a wake-up call for all

Before the Paris Olympics, commentators said that Africa was pushing to cross the 50-medal threshold for the first time. But with 64 medals, it was the Paralympic athletes who delivered on that dream.

Karien Jonckheere in Paris

Across the stands on each side of the famous Roland Garros clay court where the wheelchair tennis medal matches were contested is a phrase attributed to the French pilot and adventurer after whom the stadium is named: “Victory belongs to the most tenacious.”

It's a line most apt for the Paralympic Games. Whether it's achieving on the

greatest sporting stage or triumphing over a life-altering injury or medical condition, the 4,400 athletes competing at the Paris Games are easily the most tenacious of the human race. An armless archer, one-legged high jumpers, swimmers with no limbs at all who must crash their heads into the wall to stop the clock, blind football players who have to listen for where the specially adapted ball is.

These athletes define what it means to defy the odds. Africa won 39 of the 1,044

Team	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Algeria	6	0	5	11
Tunisia	5	3	3	11
Morocco	3	6	6	15
Nigeria	2	3	2	7
Egypt	2	2	3	7
Ethiopia	2	1	0	3
South Africa	2	0	4	6
Namibia	1	0	1	2
Kenya	0	1	0	1
Mauritius	0	0	1	1
All Africa	23	16	25	64

medals on offer at the Olympics and came away with a total of 64 of the 1,707 medals on offer at the Paralympics, with Algeria and Tunisia leading the pack.

The continent enjoyed several firsts at this year's Paralympics. Algeria's Brahim Guendouz is Africa's first champion in Para canoeing, while 18-year-old Nigerian Mariam Eniola Bolaji won Africa's first badminton medal (bronze in the women's SL3 event), and the South African pair of Donald Ramphadi and Lucas Sithole did the same in wheelchair tennis with bronze in the quad doubles.

Bolaji, who has reduced mobility in her leg because of a car accident when she was a child, said: "I hope other people in Africa will be inspired by this and come to Para badminton now."

Of all the sports, Para athletics and powerlifting proved the happiest hunting grounds for African athletes, with

Nigerian Para powerlifter Onyinyechi Mark breaking two world records in her Paralympics debut.

South African Mpumelelo Mhlongo claimed gold in the T44 100m and then bronze in the T64 200m while breaking his own T44 world records in the T44 200m and long jump. There was also much celebration as Mauritius claimed their first ever Paralympic medal – a bronze for Yovanni Philippe in the men's T20 400m.

Beyond the podiums, the Paralympics are a call for us to be better in how we relate with those who live with disability. As International Paralympic Committee president Andrew Parsons said in his closing ceremony speech: "Appreciation and applause must be followed by acceptance and action. Changed attitudes must lead to changed views ... Obstacles must become opportunities". ■

Bad economies don't put people off democracy – but bad governments do

For International Day of Democracy on 15 September, let's take a quick look under the hood of African democracy. If Africans generally support democracy (66%) but are dissatisfied with the way their own democracy is working (58%), what drives these attitudes?

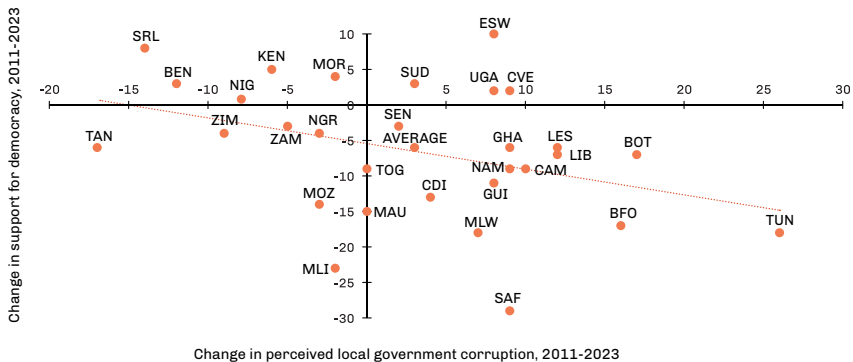
Analyses of Afrobarometer survey findings spanning more than a decade conclude that satisfaction with democracy is strongly associated with both socioeconomic and political performance. But support for democracy is different: While it can hold steady despite economic problems, it is likely to decline in response to political failures, such as

rising corruption in local government, poor-quality elections, impunity for lawbreakers, and a lack of presidential accountability.

The scatter plot below shows one example: An increase in the proportion of citizens who see “most” or “all” local government councillors as corrupt (from left to right on the horizontal axis) is associated with a decrease in support for democracy (from top to bottom on the vertical axis).

More in-depth analyses on these associations are in a new Afrobarometer report: *African Insights 2024: Democracy at Risk – the People's Perspective*.

**Corruption in local government and support for democracy
30 African countries | 2011-2023**



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



Best served cold, but it still brings the fire

Who knew vengeance, vanity and volatility made for such gripping viewing?

Wilfred Okiche

The first season of *Savage Beauty*, the campy 2022 Netflix soap opera created by Lebogang Mogashoa ended with a sizzling cliffhanger.

The avenging heroine, Zinhle (Rosemary Zimu), having infiltrated the unscrupulous family that traumatised her as a child, comes as close to getting her revenge as is humanly possible. What happens next? Does she succeed and how much is she willing to sacrifice?

Despite a two-year gap, the second season of the show picks up from here,

briefly raising some of these questions.

Savage Beauty has no use for existential dilemmas, though, concerned as it is with the transactional nature of power and the usefulness of cheap thrills. There is plenty of value to be earned in dialling up the suspense and the creative team understands this quite well, birthing six thrilling episodes that demand to be consumed in one sitting.

The writers make a bold decision early in the season to recalibrate, and this comes with a surprisingly satisfying payoff. Donovan and Grace Bhengu (Dumisani Mbebe and Nthathi Moshesh), the murderous, power-hungry founders of *Savage Beauty*'s tainted dynasty, have always been the most exciting characters on the show and the second season brings both villains into sharp focus. They battle external enemies and then each other for ultimate control of Bhengu Beauty.

The original cast returns to reprise their roles and intriguing new players are introduced to spice up the narrative.

Tony Kgoroge as a charismatic figure and potential rival of the Bhengus and Lebogang Fisher as a mysterious femme fatale figure make for particularly interesting additions.

But the show, with its mile-a-minute bombshells and hyper-dramatic structure, belongs to the charismatic Bhengus. Everyone else just orbits them.

On the saying that revenge is a dish best served cold, *Savage Beauty* makes two cases – for and against. Both are equally compelling. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"Volcanic plugs are impressive, but you'll struggle to find the right adaptor."



Photo: Getty Images

- 1_** Which African country won the most gold medals at this year's Paralympics?
- 2_** Sam Matekane is which country's prime minister?
- 3_** The High Atlas, or the Grand Atlas, is a mountain range in which country?
- 4_** Enkutatash was celebrated this week in which country?
- 5_** True or false: Kitwe is Zambia's capital city.
- 6_** Pico Cão Grande (pictured), a volcanic plug peak, is found on which African island country?
- 7_** Which present-day country was formerly named Nyasaland before it was renamed in 1964?
- 8_** In which year did the ongoing Sudan civil war begin?
- 9_** Ons Jabeur is Egypt's current number one tennis player. True or false?
- 10_** In which African country was singer Sade Adu born?

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to [+27 73 805 6068](tel:+27738056068) and we'll send the answers to you!

A clear judgment in a politicised case

A landmark treason verdict in Sierra Leone gets part of its credibility from having been reached by a jury of 12 independent citizens. Similarly politicised trials in the future won't enjoy that benefit.

Amadu Wurie Barrie

A high-profile treason trial in Sierra Leone has ended with a resounding verdict: all 11 individuals accused of plotting a coup were found guilty on all charges, and will serve sentences ranging from 30 to 182 years.

Last November, gunmen attacked a military barracks and broke into a prison freeing more than 2,000 inmates. The attack came months after President Julius Maada Bio narrowly won a flawed election which had been preceded by mass protests against his government. The government said the attack was a coup attempt and 12 people, including former president Ernest Bai Koroma, were subsequently charged with treason and related offences. Koroma now lives in exile and was not among those convicted and sentenced.

The heavy sentences, which come after convictions by a 12-member jury, reflect the judiciary's commitment to its role in upholding the rule of law and preserving constitutional order. But not everyone saw the judicial process as beyond reproach.

During the trial, defence counsel boycotted part of the proceedings, alleging that the presiding judge had prevented them from properly representing their clients. And from the start, opposition politicians had branded the arrests and claims of a coup attempt as a political witch-hunt targeting Koroma.

Yet, even as the jury trial in this high profile and politicised case was proceeding apace, in July Sierra Leone's Parliament controversially abolished jury trials, at the behest of the executive. In politicised cases such as this, independent juries represent public participation in the judicial process, lending it much needed credibility.

But thanks to the abolition of jury trials, future politicised trials will have less public participation.

Justice may be done, even then – but it might not be seen to be done. ■



Amadu Wurie Barrie works at the University of Makeni. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

New Year, New Me-skerem: An orthodox devotee prays at Bole Medhanialem Church in Addis Ababa during Enkutatash, the Ethiopian New Year holiday, which took place on Wednesday. Happy 2017, Ethiopia!

Photo: Amanuel Sileshi/AFP



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