



## Statement on abductions and torture in East Africa

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) is alarmed by a pattern of abductions and torture which has increased in several countries in East Africa – predominantly but not exclusively in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

The abductions are of opposition leaders or activists and human rights defenders who voice criticism of the government in office. Young people involved in public protests and journalists are among those abducted.

The use of abduction and torture by state agents is designed to suppress criticism and instil fear into those exercising their right to protest and to hold government to account. Such practices cannot be condoned or excused. The CLA condemns in the strongest terms those who plan, authorise, and carry out abductions.

The CLA has noted the powerful and comprehensive Statement dated 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, from the President of the East Africa Law Society (EALS). Showing leadership and courage EALS states that the abductions

*“are primarily targeted at dissidents and government critics, political activists, journalists, demonstrators and recently young people protesting against misrule.”*

The CLA agrees with EALS that:

*“detention without due process, torture and enforced disappearances signals a denial of justice”*

The CLA notes the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights which states in Article 5:

*Every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and to the recognition of his legal status. All forms of exploitation and degradation of man particularly slavery, slave trade, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment shall be prohibited.*

The African Charter also proclaims in Article 6:

*Every individual shall have the right to liberty and to the security of his person. No one may be deprived of his freedom except for reasons and conditions previously laid down by law. In particular, no one may be arbitrarily arrested or detained.*

And the CLA further notes Article 9 of the African Charter which states:

*Every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the law.*

Many of the members states of the East Africa Community are members of the Commonwealth and have accepted the principles of and committed to the Commonwealth Charter. The Commonwealth Charter states in Article 2:

*We are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights covenants and international instruments. We are committed to equality and respect for the protection and promotion of civil political economic social and cultural rights.*

The CLA, noting that EALS concludes the abductions and enforced disappearances within the East African Community has reached a critical point, agrees that,

*these acts are not only violations of individual rights but attacks on the very fabric of regional unity and human dignity.*

**The CLA, in support of and in solidarity with, EALS joins with EALS in urging:**

**all East African Community Partner States to act decisively and fast in upholding commitments to human rights and rule of law and calls upon the regions leaders to take immediate action to end these crimes.**

**Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA)**

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025**

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