

Activists to keep govt on the spot over rights abuses

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Dar es Salaam. Human rights activists have called on civil society organisations to keep pushing the government to respect press freedom.

At a breakfast dialogue organised by Policy Forum yesterday, they also warned the government it would not achieve its industrialisation goal if it continues to suppress the media.

They reiterated their criticism of laws recently enacted to tighten the leash on the press.

"We must continue talking because freedom of expression is very limited in the country, and it's been made worse by the recently enacted laws," said Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) director of advocacy and reforms, Ms Anna Henga.

She added: "These laws must be urgently reviewed to align them with our Constitution and international human rights standards."

One of the laws that have been heavily condemned is the Cyber-crime Act. The government says it is simply aimed at curbing the rise in Internet-associated crimes.

But a section of lawmakers, press freedom stakeholders and bloggers see it is a draconian step that has no place in a democratic state.

Tanzania also recently enacted the Media Services Act, 2016, the Communications Regulatory Authority Act, 2003, and the Access to Information Act, 2015.

Dr Ally Possi, a lecturer at the Law School of Tanzania, reiterated the need for responsible communication among members of the public even as the government was pressured to uphold freedom of expression.

"Much as we have rights we as well have responsibilities...we need to enjoy these rights within limits of not harming others," he stressed.

Human rights campaigners also warned that, while all law-biding citizens should pressurise the government to stop infringing on press freedom, they should be aware that by claiming their rights they shouldn't violate the rights of others.