ZAINA FOUNDATION
NEWSLETTER

PROMOTING DIGITAL RIGHTS IN A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

April–May 2025 Edition

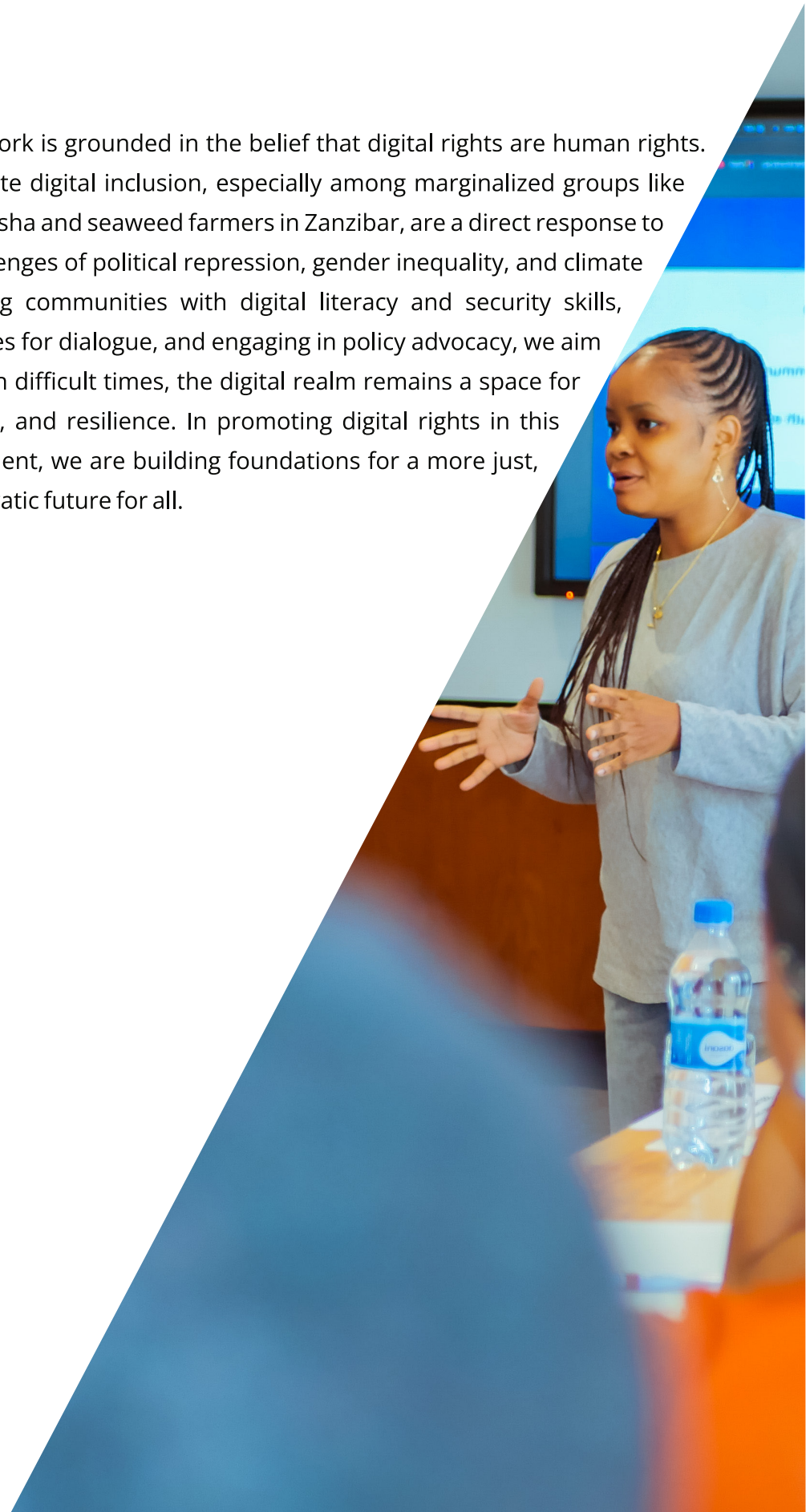## ZAINA
FOUNDATION

Dear friends and partners,

As we close out May, we reflect on a season filled with determination, collaboration, and advocacy. From navigating political tensions to advancing the digital rights of marginalized women, Zaina Foundation has remained committed to creating inclusive, secure, and empowering digital spaces in Tanzania.

Promoting Digital Rights in a Challenging Environment

In Tanzania, the digital space is increasingly becoming a vital platform for communication, activism, economic participation, and access to information. However, as the country heads toward its 2025 presidential elections, this space is also facing heightened restrictions. Rising concerns around surveillance, online censorship, and the shrinking of civic space have made it harder for citizens—especially women, indigenous communities, and rural populations—to safely and freely express themselves online. In such an environment, the need to promote and protect digital rights becomes not only urgent but essential to safeguarding democracy, inclusion, and human dignity.

Zaina Foundation's work is grounded in the belief that digital rights are human rights. Our efforts to promote digital inclusion, especially among marginalized groups like Maasai women in Arusha and seaweed farmers in Zanzibar, are a direct response to the overlapping challenges of political repression, gender inequality, and climate change. By equipping communities with digital literacy and security skills, supporting safe spaces for dialogue, and engaging in policy advocacy, we aim to ensure that even in difficult times, the digital realm remains a space for empowerment, voice, and resilience. In promoting digital rights in this challenging environment, we are building foundations for a more just, inclusive, and democratic future for all.
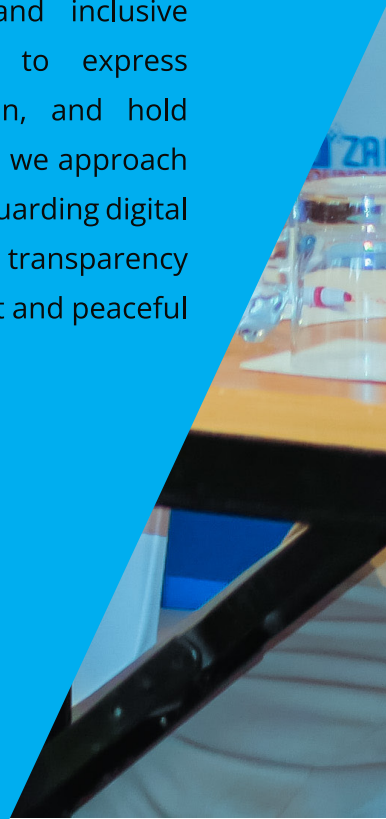
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Tanzania Must Restore Access to X and Uphold Internet Freedom

From May 20, 2025, the Government of Tanzania blocked access to X, formerly known as Twitter, following cyberattacks on official accounts including those of the police and Airtel Tanzania. One of the most alarming incidents involved the police account being hacked to post inappropriate content and a false announcement about President Samia Suluhu Hassan's death. While the government has downplayed the event, saying Tanzanian cyberspace remains secure, access to the platform was swiftly restricted nationwide. Users attempting to bypass the block using VPNs have reportedly been threatened with legal consequences, sparking growing concern among digital rights defenders.

This is not the first time Tanzanian authorities have acted to limit access to online platforms, particularly during politically sensitive periods. In August 2024, access to X was also restricted amid opposition protests and public unrest. Such actions have become part of a broader pattern of suppressing online expression and restricting the free flow of information. These crackdowns raise serious questions about the government's commitment to upholding the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, and participation in civic spaces—especially ahead of the upcoming national elections.

We join other civil society organizations and citizens in urging the Government of Tanzania to restore access to X immediately. Blocking digital platforms only deepens mistrust and undermines democratic values. Tanzanians deserve an open, secure, and inclusive internet that allows them to express themselves, share information, and hold those in power accountable. As we approach critical political moments, safeguarding digital rights is essential not only for transparency but also for building a more just and peaceful society.

Project Spotlight:

1. Digital Rights Coalition Report Dissemination of Strategic Advocacy Plan

In April 2025, Zaina Foundation convened members of the Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition for a strategic dissemination session on the newly developed Strategic Advocacy Plan 2024–2027. The session brought together digital rights defenders, civil society actors, legal experts, and journalists to review key findings and strategic recommendations aimed at advancing digital freedoms in Tanzania. The plan, which outlines a shared roadmap for coordinated advocacy, focuses on countering internet shutdowns, promoting inclusive policies, protecting online civic space, and strengthening the digital resilience of marginalized communities.

During the dissemination, Zaina Foundation facilitated rich discussions on upcoming advocacy opportunities, challenges around government surveillance and misinformation, and the urgent need for multi-sectoral collaboration in the lead-up to the 2025 elections.

. Participants were invited to align their own organisational strategies with the coalition's goals and explore synergies for collective impact. The event marked an important step toward unified action and strengthened voices in the fight for digital rights and democratic accountability in Tanzania.

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2. Internet Shutdown Training (Cohort 2)

In early May 2025, Zaina Foundation conducted the second cohort of its Internet Shutdown Training, equipping a new group of digital rights defenders, community activists, and grassroots communicators with the skills and knowledge to respond to internet disruptions. Held in a hybrid format to increase accessibility, the training focused on the legal, technical, and advocacy dimensions of internet shutdowns, which remain a growing threat to freedom of expression and access to information in Tanzania—especially during politically sensitive periods like the upcoming elections.

Participants explored case studies from across Africa, learned how to document and report shutdowns safely, and engaged in practical exercises on circumvention tools and digital resilience strategies. The training also emphasized the disproportionate impact shutdowns have on marginalized groups, particularly women and rural communities who rely on digital platforms for information, organizing, and economic activity. This second cohort marks a growing community of trained advocates prepared to push back against unjust restrictions and ensure the internet remains an open, accessible, and secure space for all.

3. Tanzania School of Internet Governance (TzSIG2025)

On 15 May 2025, Zaina Foundation and ISOC Tanzania convened the Tanzania School of Internet Governance (TzSIG) 2025 in Dar es Salaam under the theme "Strengthening Digital Inclusion and Resilience in Tanzania," bringing together policymakers, technologists, civil society advocates, and students for a day of rich dialogue and practical learning. Opening remarks set clear objectives—understanding Internet governance, bridging the digital divide, and addressing emerging challenges such as data protection ahead of the general election and ethical AI—and invited participants to share experiences and leave with actionable ideas.

ISOC Tanzania kicked off the program with an engaging overview of Internet governance as a multistakeholder process, illustrating its relevance through scenarios like content filtering and the risks of shutdowns during elections.

. Zaina Foundation then painted a vivid picture of Tanzania's connectivity landscape—where only half the population has reliable access and women, low-income households, and remote communities face device, data, and literacy barriers—and highlighted UCSAF's work to extend mobile towers, ICT labs, and digital

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Project Spotlight:

4. Africa School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG2025)

In May 2025, Zaina Foundation proudly partnered with APC and UNECA to host the Africa School on Internet Governance in Dar es Salaam, a program specifically designed for senior digital activists, policy makers, and civil society leaders from across Africa.

This intensive training equipped experienced participants with advanced knowledge on internet governance, digital rights, policy frameworks, and pressing challenges such as data privacy, cybersecurity, and digital inclusion. Through expert-led sessions, strategic discussions, and practical exercises, the program strengthened their ability to engage effectively in regional and global internet governance processes, advocate for feminist and environmentally just digital policies, and promote inclusive internet access. The event fostered collaboration among seasoned leaders, enabling them to amplify marginalized voices and influence decision-making spaces across the continent.

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5. Africa Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF2025)

Following the Africa School on Internet Governance, Zaina Foundation actively participated in the Africa Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF 2025) held in Dar es Salaam. This regional forum brought together diverse stakeholders—policy makers, civil society, tech experts, and youth advocates—to discuss key issues shaping Africa's digital future, including digital rights, infrastructure development, and governance challenges.

Zaina Foundation used this important platform to deepen its learning, share insights from its grassroots work, and strengthen networks with fellow digital rights defenders across the continent. Engagement in AfIGF 2025 allowed the foundation to contribute to collective strategies that promote a more inclusive, equitable, and secure digital environment in Tanzania and beyond.

6. Partnerships during April and May

- Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition
- Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
- Access Now
- Tunnelbear
- Open Observatory for Network Interference (OONI)
- Tanzania Women Human Rights Defenders Coalition
- Tech and Media Convergence
- CIPESA
- Tanzania AI Community

7. Upcoming Event

"Policy Roundtable on Digital Rights and Inclusion in Tanzania in the Lead-Up to the 2025 Elections."

If you have any feedback please send us email to
info@zainafoundationtz.org

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