

15 December 2016

Tanzania – Maxence M. Melo arrested and detained

On 13 December 2016, human rights defender Mr **Maxence M. Melo** was arrested by Tanzanian authorities in Dar es Salaam, reportedly after refusing to reveal the names of anonymous contributors to the blog site, **Jamii Forums** to police.

[Maxence M. Melo](#) is a human rights defender working on issues of freedom of expression, digital security, and freedom of information. He is the founder and owner of the blogging site, [Jamii Forums](#), which hosts blogs and reports on breaking news. Jamii Forums was founded as a space in which Tanzanian citizens could engage in discussions about social, political, and economic issues anonymously. This tenet of Jamii Forums' mission was a step to promote freedom of expression in Tanzania and to ensure the privacy of citizens who sought to engage in online discussion of current issues. Additionally, Jamii Forums seeks to encourage citizen journalists to report on issues, offering an alternative to mainstream news outlets. Since the establishment of Jamii Forums in 2006, the blog site has stood by its commitment to digital privacy and confidentiality, despite reports that Tanzanian authorities repeatedly requested information about its anonymous contributors.

On 13 December, 2016 Maxence M. Melo received a phone call from the Central Police Station in Dar es Salaam requesting that he present himself at the station. Upon arriving at the station, Maxence M. Melo was arrested. According to the Tanzanian Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), Maxence M. Melo's refusal to reveal contributors to blogs on the Jamii Forum led to his arrest by authorities. Maxence M. Melo is reportedly being held at the police station in relation to a pending case being investigated by the police, entitled *Jamii Forums vs Attorney General Case 9 of 2016*, that was launched following requests for information concerning Jamii Forums' contributors.

In 2015, Tanzania enacted the Cyber Crimes Act, which includes an ambiguous provision allowing for up to six months' imprisonment for publishing 'false or misleading' information online. Under this new law, on 16 January 2016, the Criminal Investigation Department of the Tanzanian Police Force sent a letter demanding that Jamii Forums disclose an IP address of a user who had posted an article on the website. On 26 January 2016, the Cyber Crimes Unit of the Tanzania Police Force sent a letter demanding that Jamii Forums disclose information about two users who had posted an article. They demanded the full name, email address, and all posts that the users had made on the website. On 23 February 2016, Jamii received another similar request from the Cyber Crimes Unit. In response to each letter, Jamii Forums responded that, in order to disclose this sensitive information, they needed to know the offences allegedly committed by the users whose information was sought. Jamii Forums maintained that they have a legal duty to protect the private information of their contributors, in keeping with the law and the site's privacy policy. While recognizing that Jamii Forums may occasionally need to divulge information concerning its contributors, it acknowledges that this should be done in full accordance with the law.

Front Line Defenders expresses their concern at Maxence M. Melo's arrest as it believes his arrest was motivated by his legitimate defence of human rights in Tanzania.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Tanzania to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Maxence M. Melo, and drop all charges against him as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights and digital security;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Maxence M. Melo, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the '*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Tanzania are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.