

PRESS RELEASE ON THE BAN OF TWITTER IN NIGERIA

Accountability Lab Nigeria, YIAGA Africa, Dataphyte, Premium Times and a number of partner organizations have received news of the decision by the Federal Government of Nigeria- led by President Muhammadu Buhari- to suspend Twitter in Nigeria with trepidation and unease. It is regrettable that the Federal Government has chosen to stifle the rights of citizens with this move which stands to retract the minimal progress made around freedom of expression and media independence since the days of military rule in Nigeria. As the giant of Africa, Nigeria cannot be seen to be undermining constitutional rights and democracy by muzzling and subduing its citizens. Press freedom has historically been a contentious issue in many African countries, with [Nigeria](#) criticised as one of West Africa's most dangerous and difficult countries for journalists. The [RSF Tracker 19 tool](#) exposes [great hostility and mistrust towards African journalists and media outlets](#), which are too often regarded as enemies rather than allies.

The consistent disregard for the Constitution, the rule of law, and the rights of citizens by the administration has become more alarming and leads to questions about the President's capacity to lead a democratic nation such as Nigeria where diverse voices matter for an inclusive society. The Federal Government cannot continue to disregard the constitution that President Buhari swore to [uphold](#). [The ban on Twitter is a direct attack on the freedom of expression, free speech, and rights](#) of every Nigerian who uses social media.

COVID19 has exposed the underlying causes of vulnerability in our governance system which stem from inequalities, injustice and discrimination, weak institutions, and inadequate policies which are all important building blocks for a democratic society. [Twitter is one of the platforms that has been beneficial in shaping perceptions](#) such as ensuring the participation of excluded groups and people with disabilities in local decision-making processes, and identifying societal issues that are collectively addressed. Crackdowns and the criminalization of journalism are inadequate responses to the tremendous challenges facing us in this epidemic.

The ban on Twitter came as a shock to young people across the country, especially in light of current strides being made by young citizens in the tech space. On the 15th of October, Paystack, [a Nigerian startup out of Lagos was acquired by online processing platform Stripe for over \\$200 million](#) to expand into the African continent. Fintech startup, [Kuda, raised over \\$25 million in seed investment](#) to provide a modern digital banking service for Africans. More recently, a digital Nigerian [escrow company won a \\$100 million business grant](#) from Facebook and has put plans in place to provide visibility to small businesses run by digital entrepreneurs across the 36 states of the country. These are just some of the recent examples of Nigerian innovators excelling in social and economic development through the digital space.

Such a ban will only stifle the ambitions of young Nigerians, many of whom were already using the platform to market their businesses and expand to new markets around the globe. It is equally harmful to the entertainment and media industries as many content creators will be unable to reach their audiences. The ban closes the door to open dialogue between Nigerians both locally and in the diaspora. Furthermore, it hampers the fundamental rights of Nigerians to free speech, freedom of expression and greatly limits the civic space in the country. It halts the ability of citizens to express their views and contribute to the political and social structures in Nigeria. The Twitter platform and similar social media sites have become instrumental to socio-

political discourse in the country, have improved interest in the democratic process among youth, and encouraged inclusion in governance.

It should be recalled that the freedom of the press has been under constant attack in Nigeria. Since 2015 when President Buhari assumed office, over [226 cases of attacks on the Nigerian media have been recorded by the PTCIJ's Press Attack Tracker](#). These cases include physical attacks, sanctions, surveillance, closure of radio and TV stations, imprisonments and killings among other forms of oppression. A similar platform managed by [Spaces for Change, has recorded over 320](#) instances of the federal government and other affiliated institutions clamping down on civic space. Broad categories of these attempts to close civic space include restrictions on free speech, freedom of association and assembly, and the anti-NGO bill (officially labelled '*a Bill for an Act To Provide For The Establishment Of The Non-Governmental Organizations Regulatory Commission For The Supervision, Coordination And Monitoring Of Non Governmental Organizations*'). The recent executive directive to deny access to Twitter in Nigeria as well as the call by the Attorney General of the Federation to arrest citizens who use Twitter is therefore yet another assault on civic space. The totality of these actions by the Buhari administration hampers livelihoods and impacts fundamental human rights. What's more, the call for the arrest of Twitter users outrightly violates the Constitution and the institutions of the National Assembly and the Judiciary that uphold it.

We condemn the ban on Twitter and solicit the Federal Government's review and reversal of its decision as it is an unconstitutional move in a democratic society. We also call on the legislative arm to respect the separation of powers entrenched in the Constitution and exercise its oversight powers to guarantee Nigerians their fundamental human rights to life, association, expression, assembly, and the freedom of the press.

This press release is signed by:

- Accountability Lab Nigeria
- YIAGA Africa
- Premium Times
- Partner West Africa Nigeria
- Dataphyte
- The Future Project
- Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN), Nigeria
- Young Leaders Network
- Leadtots Development Initiative