

# OFFICIAL STATEMENT AGAINST RESTRICTION OF VPN USE IN TANZANIA

The Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition, a united front of organizations committed to upholding and promoting digital rights, unequivocally condemns the recent statement issued on Friday, 13 October 2023 by the Tanzanian Communication Regulatory Authority (TCRA) restricting the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) in Tanzania. We firmly believe that the right to access information, maintain privacy, and express oneself freely on the internet is fundamental to a democratic and inclusive society.

TCRA's decision to limit the use of VPNs in Tanzania has far-reaching implications for the digital rights and freedoms of Tanzanian citizens. VPNs play a crucial role in safeguarding online privacy, enabling secure communication, and granting access to information and services that may otherwise be restricted or censored. Furthermore, VPNs are essential tools for many businesses, researchers, and individuals to access online resources securely and conduct their activities without undue interference.

One notable consequence of this restriction is the impediment of access to platforms like Clubhouse. The availability of Clubhouse through VPNs has allowed Tanzanian citizens to participate in global conversations, share their perspectives, and engage with a diverse range of ideas. Limiting this access not only stifles freedom of expression but also hinders opportunities for cultural exchange, learning, and networking.

The Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition asserts the following key points:

1. **Freedom of Expression and Access to Information:** The internet is a vital source of information, education, and economic opportunities. The right to free expression, including online discourse, is a fundamental human right recognized internationally. Limiting VPN usage often corresponds with curbing freedom of expression and restricting access to unbiased information. VPNs allow individuals in Tanzania and elsewhere to access information without the fear of censorship or surveillance, thus upholding the universal human right to seek, receive, and impart information.

2. **Respect for Privacy and Security:** VPNs play a pivotal role in safeguarding users against cyber threats, unauthorized surveillance, and data breaches. Limiting their use threatens the personal and data security of Tanzanian citizens, making them vulnerable to surveillance and potential cyberattacks.
3. **Economic Considerations:** In our rapidly digitizing world, VPNs are vital tools for businesses and professionals. They enable secure connections, protect trade secrets, and facilitate international collaboration. Restricting them can hinder Tanzania's potential growth and integration in the global digital economy.
4. **Societal Implications:** A free and open internet fosters innovation, cultural exchange, and societal progress. By imposing barriers on tools like VPNs, we risk creating a fragmented, isolated, and less informed society.
5. **Security Concerns:** Requiring individuals and companies in Tanzania to declare their VPN usage and provide their IP addresses to the authority infringes upon the fundamental right to privacy. While the regulator might claim that the data they collect will be kept secure, there's no guarantee against potential breaches. If IP addresses and the associated data were to be exposed, it could put individuals at risk. Such demands for personal information without a clear and compelling reason is considered invasive.
6. **Global Connectivity:** In an increasingly interconnected world, access to global platforms like Clubhouse fosters cross-cultural understanding, networking, and collaboration. Limiting this access hinders Tanzanian citizens' ability to engage with the global community. Clubhouse has been inaccessible without VPN in Tanzania since February 2023.

We call on the Tanzanian government and TCRA to reconsider their decision to restrict VPN usage and instead engage in constructive dialogue with civil society organizations, businesses, and citizens to address concerns while upholding digital rights. We urge them to respect and protect the rights of Tanzanian citizens to access information, communicate securely, and express themselves freely online.

We stand ready to collaborate with all stakeholders to find solutions that balance national security concerns with the protection of digital rights. We remain committed to promoting a free, open, and secure digital environment for all Tanzanian citizens.

In solidarity with the Tanzanian people, and in defense of a free, open, and secure internet for all,

## Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition

Our members:

- 1) JamiiForums
- 2) The Launchpad Tanzania
- 3) Legal and Human Rights Center (LHRC)
- 4) Twaweza
- 5) Tanzania Human Rights Defenders (THRDC)
- 6) Union of Tanzania Press Clubs (UTPC)
- 7) Pollicy
- 8) Her Initiative
- 9) Haki Elimu
- 10) Sahara Ventures
- 11) Nukta Africa
- 12) WiLDAF
- 13) d-Lab
- 14) Digital Maarifa
- 15) Haki Maendeleo
- 16) Tangible Initiative
- 17) C-Sema
- 18) Tanzania Bloggers Association
- 19) CWHRD
- 20) Organization for Digital Africa
- 21) Internet Society
- 22) TAI Tanzania
- 23) Digital Guardians Alliance (DiGA)