

News24.- 06.06.2023

Lenin Ndebele

## Senegal's government blocks social media amid riots and repression

### *Уряд Сенегалу блокує соціальні мережі через заворушення та репресії*

*Коли заворушення поширилися по всій столиці, уряд Сенегала майже повністю заблокував соціальні мережі. Місцеві жителі тепер не можуть мобілізуватись через Інтернет.*

*Заворушення почалися після винесення вироку лідеру опозиції У. Сонко з організації «Африканські патріоти Сенегалу за працю, етику та братерство», яка закликала громадськість проводити демонстрації доти, доки президент Сенегалу Макі Салл не залишить свою посаду. Уряд заявив, що з початку заворушень 15 людей загинули і понад 500 було заарештовано. Рух #FreeSenegal був створений у соціальних мережах, але через відключення інтернету припинив своє існування.*

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/senegals-government-blocks-social-media-amid-riots-and-repression-20230606>

Senegalese condemn restriction of social media over unrest

In Senegal, there is limited internet for people with Wi-Fi and VPN connectivity.

The network provider said it was instructed to shut down the internet by the government.

As such, locals are unable to mobilise via the internet, which has led to riots dying down.

There's a near-total media blackout in Senegal due to the government's blockage of social media last week when riots spread across the capital.

The riots began after the sentencing of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, of the African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (Pastef).

Sonko was tried and sentenced, in absentia, to two years for "corrupting young people".

The charges could result in him failing to stand for next year's presidential elections. Since the start of the riots, the government said 15 people were reported dead, and more than 500 were arrested.

Pastef, in a statement, urged the public to demonstrate until President Macky Sall left office. A #FreeSenegal movement was created on social media, but has since died down due to the internet shutdown.

"People can't mobilise because they can't communicate," a Senegalese journalist told News24. He added that the WhatsApp shutdown had made it worse for people to spread the word and challenge the regime.

"A lot of people, who don't know how to read, rely heavily on audio messages, but it can't be shared because mobile internet is down," he said.

"For me to get more access to the internet, I am relying on VPNs (virtual private networks), and they too are blocked from time to time, and I have to look for another. Even then, we don't have access to YouTube. The reality is that you can't have the internet outside your house."

Another journalist said they didn't have a mobile connection on Monday between 13:00 and 03:00. Mobile operator Orange sent messages to inform subscribers the government had instructed them to shut down the internet.

Journalists, who spoke to News24, said the situation had become calm by Monday, but the movement of people was limited to their localities due to the heavy presence of state machinery.

The journalists spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing for their lives, because they were using unofficial channels to communicate with the outside world.

Sall is the most recent past African Union chairperson. The sudden repression in his country has presented the continental bloc with hard questions.

In a statement, the president of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, who worked with Sall extensively on continental issues last year, said political actors in Senegal should "observe the greatest restraint and to avoid such acts which tarnish the face of Senegalese democracy, of which Africa has always been proud".

Mahamat called on all citizens to respect order and the rule of law, reminding the government to respect "their rights of freedom of expression and demonstration."

Want to discuss hotly debated topics with someone from across the world? Sign up for our global dialogue programme and get matched for a conversation