

# The Continent



**Making football  
political again**



**COVER:** Sport is meant to transcend politics, yet this year's World Cup has instead showcased the arbitrary exercise of political power. Fifa president Gianni Infantino bent over backwards to stay in President Donald Trump's good graces – but if his goal was to shield the tournament from the harsh edges of Trump's administration, he failed. Players, referees, journalists and supporters travelling to the United States have faced visa denials, invasive searches, travel restrictions, and threats of immigration raids. The US was eager to host the World Cup in 2026, its 250th anniversary of independence. But its messy start is hardly the stuff of celebration. Unlike in Mogadishu, where Omar Artan, the Somali referee denied entry to the US, returned home to a hero's welcome – and our journalist was there for it (p14).

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# THE WEEK IN BRIEF



PHOTO: DIMITAR DILKOFF / AFP

## THE HAGUE

### Sexual abuse case fells ICC prosecutor

The International Criminal Court has suspended its chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, after a disciplinary process found he committed serious misconduct linked to sexual abuse allegations. *The Guardian* reports the decision follows a vote by the court's governing committee, which referred the matter to all 125 member states, and could lead to Khan's removal. Khan, a British lawyer, denies the allegations, which stem from claims made by an ex-staffer relating to his conduct between 2023 and 2024 in The Hague and during official travel.

## EUROPE

### Robbed blind by 'reverse remittances'

European Union countries collected nearly \$182-million in non-refundable fees from visa applications rejected in 2025, according to data from Lago Collective. This is a rise from \$150-million in 2023, *EUObserver* reports. Africans accounted for 42% of the money lost, despite making up just 24% of applicants. People from Bangladesh, Senegal, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Angola faced the highest rejection rates. Critics call the system "reverse remittances" as money flows from poorer countries to richer ones for trips that never happen.

## UGANDA

### Ebola 'under control'

Uganda has brought its Ebola outbreak "under control" through aggressive contact tracing, says Jean Kaseya, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control. The country has recorded 19 cases and two deaths in the past month, *AFP* reports. In neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, Ebola has been linked to 635 confirmed cases and 127 deaths. There is no vaccine or specific treatment for the Bundibugyo strain behind the outbreak.



## ALGERIA

### Path to pardon opens for jailed journalist

An Algerian court has cleared the way for a possible presidential pardon for French journalist Christophe Gleizes, *France24* reports. The country's highest appeals court rejected prosecutors' bid for a tougher sentence, noting Gleizes had withdrawn his own appeal. The sports journalist was arrested in May 2024 on charges of "glorifying terrorism" after making contact with members of a separatist group while reporting on football club Jeunesse Sportive de Kabylie. Algeria often issues pardons on major national and religious holidays, including independence day on 5 July.

## SUDAN

### State tightens screws on mining sector

Prime Minister Kamil Idris has ordered the immediate removal of gold-processing mills from residential and military areas after livestock reportedly died from water contaminated by mining chemicals, *Sudan Tribune* reports. Authorities will also introduce compulsory identity cards for miners and increase security at artisanal mining sites. These account for 80% of Sudan's gold production and employ about two million people. Some of the proceeds from Sudan's largely unregulated gold sector are reportedly used to finance warring groups in the country.

**SOUTH AFRICA**

**‘African family values’ – made in America**

South Africa has rejected an “African family values” charter promoted by US campaigners. MP Zandile Majozi, who represented South Africa at a leaders’ conference in Accra last week, said the charter could reverse protections for women, children, and LGBTQI+ people. It’s marketed as “Africa-inspired, African-initiated, and African-directed”, and the answer to the threat of “foreign ideologies”. Behind the scenes, ultraconservative campaigner Sharon Slater, a Mormon from Arizona, and Valerie Huber, a former Donald Trump adviser, have



PHOTO: FRANCIS KOKOROKO/REUTERS

*Values for money: Delegates arrive at a conference on ‘family values’ in Accra, Ghana.*

been linked to the emergence of the charter.

**CHAGOS ISLANDS**

**How about empire by chequebook?**

The United States could buy the Chagos Islands when Britain transfers sovereignty to Mauritius. This is one of the proposals being considered by Donald Trump’s administration, which wants to secure direct US control of the Diego Garcia military base, *The Telegraph* reports. Earlier this year, Trump and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer traded strong words when the latter refused to let the US use Diego Garcia for offensive strikes on Iran. Buying Chagos would also let the US project more power in the Indo-Pacific.

**ZAMBIA**

**Debt deal swaps bond payments for power**

Zambia has secured a \$1.36-billion debt buyback deal linked to improving the country’s electricity grid, with the backing of almost all bondholders, *Reuters* reports. The government will use a \$600-million loan from the African Development Bank, as well as its own funds, to buy back a sovereign bond due in 2053. In return, Zambia has committed to spending up to \$275-million over 15 years upgrading its power network. The government says it is the world’s first debt-for-energy swap.

**NIGER**

## Dozens die of thirst in Sahara crossing

Rescuers buried at least 49 people in mass graves after they died of severe dehydration in a remote section of the Sahara Desert in northern Niger, *Le Monde* reports. According to authorities, the group was travelling from Mali to celebrate Eid al-Adha when their truck broke down, leaving them stranded without water. Two of the travellers managed to walk more than 50km to a nearby water source and then onwards to the border town of Assamaka, where they alerted the authorities. Help came too late for those who remained.

**EQUATORIAL GUINEA**

## US deportation deal challenged

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has been asked to stop the United States from deporting migrants to Equatorial Guinea under a controversial "third-country" agreement. The suit, filed on behalf of 14 deportees, also asks the court to mandate legal representation for these individuals, *Al Jazeera* reports. The US is sending people it doesn't want to countries like Equatorial Guinea, which may return them to the countries they fled for fear of persecution. Such actions are a potential violation of international protections.

**KENYA**

## Ruto's ex-ally loses court battle to get his job back

A Kenyan court has upheld the October 2024 impeachment of former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua. Three judges rejected Gachagua's claim that the process was politically motivated, although they ruled the senate violated his rights by continuing proceedings after he fell ill. He was awarded \$386,000 in compensation but remains barred from public office, the *BBC* reports – a consolation prize, but not his job back. Gachagua, once



PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP

**Undeplayed:** Former Kenyan deputy president Rigathi Gachagua isn't getting his job back.

Ruto's running mate but now a fierce critic, has vowed to appeal.

## NEWS

## LESOTHO

# King's car kills football legend

The death of a national hero lays bare a string of fatalities caused by the royal household.

**TŠOLOANE MOHLOMI IN MASERU**

LESOTHO is mourning one of its most celebrated figures, Tšeliso “Frisco” Khomari, who died at his home in an accident involving a vehicle from King Letsie III’s office.

The king attended his funeral and eulogised Khomari, but this is only the latest fatal accident involving his fleet.

Khomari, one of Lesotho’s first international football stars, played for Bloemfontein Celtic in South Africa in the 1980s. He later served in senior positions in the communications ministry and the senate.

According to Khomari’s family, he died when a driver sent to deliver an invitation to Queen ’Masenate Mohato Seeiso’s 50th birthday party accidentally accelerated instead of breaking as he approached Khomari.

“The car forcefully surged forward and rammed into Frisco,” his brother said at the funeral.

The tragedy has put a spotlight on

what appears to be a pattern of negligent driving by the king’s employees.

Earlier this year, a vehicle in the king’s convoy struck and killed a woman in Ha Thetsane. Reportedly, this happened after the convoy sped over a blind ascent. In April 2025, a car from the king’s motorcade killed a pedestrian in Lithabaneng, Maseru.

Lesotho’s narrow roads, particularly in urban areas, are poorly suited to high-speed vehicles. According to the traffic department, over 350 road deaths were recorded in the country last year.

Although the royal family covers funeral expenses for victims, Lesotho’s Constitution grants the king legal immunity, making accountability difficult when royal vehicles are implicated in fatal incidents.

Police spokesperson Thabo Mohai told *The Continent* that they have opened an investigation into the driver of the royal car that killed Khomari. ■



PHOTO: LESOTHO GOVERNMENT

**Gone:** The funeral of Tšeliso “Frisco” Khomari

# SOUTH AFRICA

## Birth-certificate cluster bucks efficiency trend

The growing backlog for birth registrations threatens Home Affairs' image as a rare government success story.

KIRI RUPIAH

SOUTH Africa's department of home affairs is facing scrutiny over "severe delays" in processing birth certificates.

On Wednesday, the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town and a group of South African parents appeared in court seeking an order to get Home Affairs to deal with the backlog. Rights groups say it affects hundreds of thousands of people.

South African law requires births to be registered within 30 days. If they are not, parents must navigate a more complex process known as "late registration of birth", which requires additional documentation and verification.

At the centre of the court case are 15 children and two adults whose birth registrations have been stuck in the system for years.

One of the applicants, now 20 years



PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS

*Paper trail: People queue at a mobile station set up by South Africa's department of home affairs.*

old, said the lack of a birth certificate has limited her life.

She struggled to enrol in school, missed opportunities to participate in competitive sports, and, after leaving school, found herself unable to apply for apprenticeships because she could not obtain a national identity document.

"I feel invisible," she told *The Continent*. "There's nowhere I can go and nothing I can do because I don't have ID."

Rights groups in South Africa estimate that as many as 258,000 delayed registrations submitted between 2018 and 2022 remained unresolved. But in a separate case last year, Home Affairs claimed that the backlog was just 33,386.

In recent years, Home Affairs Minister Leon Schreiber has repeatedly lauded his department for expanding digital services to clear backlogs for visa and other document applications. He did not respond to requests for comment from *The Continent*. ■

# Reading is resistance



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## KENYA

# Progressive ruling backs transgender dignity

Kenya's judiciary has set another precedent for LGBTQIA+ rights in the country.

AMY MOYI IN NAIROBI

THE HIGH court has ruled that no one should be automatically barred from applying to change their sex or gender marker on official documents.

This means Kenya joins a small but growing group of African countries, including South Africa and Botswana, that recognise the right of transgender people to align their legal identity with their gender identity.

The decision is another step in

making Kenya's complex LGBTQIA+ rights landscape incrementally more progressive.

The country retains colonial-era laws criminalising consensual sex between men, but identifying as LGBTQIA+ is not illegal and lesbian relationships are not explicitly criminalised.

Kenyan courts have repeatedly upheld constitutional protections for LGBTQIA+ people. Legal analyst Shadrack Wambui said that the ruling extends this jurisprudence.

In a 2023 ruling, Kenya's Supreme Court affirmed that LGBTQIA+ people have a right to form associations. Three months later, a lower court sentenced a man to 30 years in prison for murdering Sheila Lumumba, a lesbian who rejected his sexual advances.

In 2024, another court sentenced a man to 50 years for the murder of prominent LGBTQIA+ rights activist and designer, Edwin Chiloba. Activists had feared that Chiloba's murderer would get a slap on the wrist because the two men had been living as same-sex romantic partners.



PHOTO: JULIA REINHART/GETTY IMAGES

**System failure:** Audrey Mbugua told the court that attempts to amend her records had repeatedly failed.

Audrey Mbugua, Maureen Muiya, and Arnest Thaiya, brought the recently decided case. All three had previously written to the registrar of births seeking to change the names and gender on their national IDs and passports but were told the law did not permit such changes.

They argued that discrepancies between their gender identities and official documents had exposed them to abuse, discrimination, harassment, and exclusion.

Mbugua told the court that attempts to amend her records had repeatedly failed and that she had been denied gender-reassignment surgery at Kenyatta National Hospital.

Thaiya recounted being arrested after police questioned identity documents that listed him as female. He said officers ordered him to strip to prove his gender and detained him for seven days when he refused.

Justice Bahati Mwamuye ruled that applications from people seeking to change gender-identity markers should be considered and resolved, not simply dismissed.

“The Constitution of Kenya 2010 properly interpreted requires that statutory discretion in matters of civil registration be exercised in a manner consistent with the Bill of Rights,” Mwamuye said.

The court also ordered the relevant government agencies to receive and determine Mbugua’s application within 60 days and consider future applications on a case-by-case basis without discrimination.

Kenya now needs a framework to guide government officers deciding on such applications, rights groups say.

“In the absence of such a framework, there is no uniform legal guidance on the criteria to be considered, the procedures to be followed, the documentation required, or the manner in which such applications should be processed, leading to inconsistencies and uncertainty in decision-making,” said Milka Wahu, the executive director of Amka Africa Justice Initiative, a transgender-rights group.

In a press statement, the Kenya Human Rights Commission, a nongovernmental organisation, said it is willing to work with relevant stakeholders to develop “fair, practical, clear, and rights-based administrative and policy measures that respond to the realities faced by transgender people in Kenya.” ■



PHOTO: JINSIANGU

**Struggle continues:** The rights of gender-diverse Kenyans still face institutionalised intransigence.

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# DRC

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## Eye in the sky, knife in the back

**Africa CDC says Starlink is essential to containing the Ebola outbreak, but security experts say it's certain to help militant groups too. And Elon Musk could pull the plug on a whim.**

**MOUTTASEM ALBARODI**

STARLINK has donated 150 satellite-internet kits for deployment in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where health workers are battling a growing Ebola outbreak.

Jean Kaseya, the director of Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC), told a recent press conference that the equipment will help responders know exactly “who is where” and maintain accurate contact-tracing lists.

“Without it, we cannot say that we can control this outbreak,” Kaseya said.

The donation marks a remarkable reversal for a technology that Congolese authorities considered a security threat until recently: Starlink was banned in the DRC in 2024 over fears that its terminals could fall into the hands of armed groups operating in the country's east.

Last year, however, the government lifted the ban as part of a wider agreement with the United States, which included provisions granting preferential access to American firms in the mining sector.

The initial concerns have not

disappeared. A spokesperson from African Security Analysis, a Sweden-based consultancy, told *The Continent*: “Any deployment of advanced communications equipment in an active conflict zone carries a dual-use risk. Even when the purpose is humanitarian, the equipment can become valuable if captured, diverted, or absorbed into local conflict economies.”

Evidence is growing that Starlink does get absorbed into local conflict economies. Across the Sahel and Central Africa, the portable yet reliable high-speed connectivity has helped militant groups to co-ordinate attacks, distribute propaganda, evade law enforcement, and sustain illicit economic activities, according to 2025 investigations by *Bloomberg* and The Global Initiative Against Organised Crime.

African Security Analysis reports that Starlink terminals have already surfaced among Islamic State cells in Butembo, one of the areas in eastern DRC affected by the current Ebola outbreak.

This isn't the only concern.

“Dependence on foreign-controlled



PHOTO: JOSPIN MWISHA/AFP

**Viral spiral:** Starlink is being used to co-ordinate Ebola response teams and contact-tracing in the DRC.

communications for critical functions such as emergency services or public health means states have limited insight into how the network is operated and data is processed,” said Joscha Abels, a lecturer in political economy at the University of Tübingen.

Lamine Traore, the director of digital and information systems at Institut Pasteur Dakar, which is part of the DRC Ebola response, said end-to-end encryption should prevent a connectivity provider such as Starlink from accessing the health data it carries – if properly implemented.

But the question of control remains open. Elon Musk, whose SpaceX provides the Starlink services, retains the ability to decide when, where, and under what conditions it is available.

That proved risky for Ukraine.

According to *Reuters*, on Musk’s orders, SpaceX employees deactivated more than 100 Starlink terminals in Ukraine in September 2022. During a pivotal push to regain territory from Russia, Ukrainian drones monitoring the battlefield went dark.

Efforts that mitigated this risky dependence on a private corporation were kneecapped by last year’s aid cuts. After the 2018-2020 Kivu Ebola epidemic, the DRC received substantial international support to modernise and digitise its disease-surveillance systems.

Much of that infrastructure, however, depended heavily on donor funding. When major aid cuts hit last year, surveillance capacity deteriorated rapidly. The DRC was the African country hardest hit by USAid cuts and the third-most-affected globally. ■

## REPORT

# The World Cup that isn't

It's supposed to be an unforgettable tournament. The US is ensuring American hostility to outsiders will be the most unforgettable thing about the 2026 football World Cup.



*Blue wave: Somalis welcome Omar Artan home after the US refused him entry.* PHOTO: HASSAN ALI ELM/AFIP

## MOHAMED GABOBE IN MOGADISHU AND YUSUF OMOTAYO IN LAGOS

ON WEDNESDAY, crowds in Mogadishu cheered as Africa's top-ranked referee stepped off a Turkish Airlines flight at Aden Adde International Airport.

Ministers, sports officials, journalists, and fans waving Somali flags had gathered to give him a hero's welcome.

"I'm just as happy as I was when it was first announced he'd be refereeing at the World Cup," said Farhiyo Mumin, who was among a group of women waiting at the airport gate to welcome Omar Abdulkadir Artan's motorcade.

"The US has turned him away but we've welcomed him with open arms."

Days earlier, Artan had been denied entry into the United States after arriving

in Miami, Florida. American authorities claimed that Artan, who was travelling on a diplomatic passport, was suspected of having ties with terror organisations. Somalia is subject to a US travel ban.

“Since when is being Somali illegal?” asked Asha Ibrahim, a football fan in Mogadishu. She said she was more eager to see Artan officiating matches than she was to see the star footballers who play in the world’s premier football tournament.

Many other Somalis saw Artan’s selection for the World Cup as a major milestone for the country, only for it to be snuffed out in a collision between international sport – which is supposed to transcend politics – and US politics.

“Omar is collateral in a culture war he has no connection to,” said Jethro Norman, a researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies.

“The distinction between Somalia, Somalis abroad, and the Somali diaspora is being collapsed by a president who uses the notion of Somalia as a hotbed

of violence and extremism as a prop in a domestic fight.”

The US carried out more than 120 military operations in Somalia in 2025, making it one of the most intensive periods of American military activity in the country.

### Grovelling for nought

An estimated 10-million people are expected to visit the US for the World Cup. Even so, President Donald Trump’s administration is threatening to go full steam ahead with its immigration sweeps, in which people who are not contravening US laws have often been harassed.

“You’re going to see more ICE agents than you’ve ever seen ... and it’s coming,” Tom Homan, who heads Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) threatened the leaders of New York this week.

His comment was in reaction to a recent New York state law limiting local



**Whistle-stop:**  
Somali ref Omar Abdulkadir Artan, who had been expected to officiate at World Cup matches but was denied entry to the United States, was met by cheering crowds on his return to Mogadishu.

PHOTOS: FEISAL OMAR/  
REUTERS

co-operation with the federal agency. The city and nearby New Jersey are hosting eight World Cup matches, including the final.

The Trump administration maintains this hardline stance despite a months-long charm offensive by the Federation of International Football Associations (Fifa), and its president Gianni Infantino.

At a ceremony in December, Infantino presented Trump with an inaugural “Fifa Peace Prize”.

To some observers, the award looked like a transparent attempt to satisfy Trump’s well-known desire for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Accepting the made-up substitute, Trump said that this year’s tournament would “set every record you can set”.

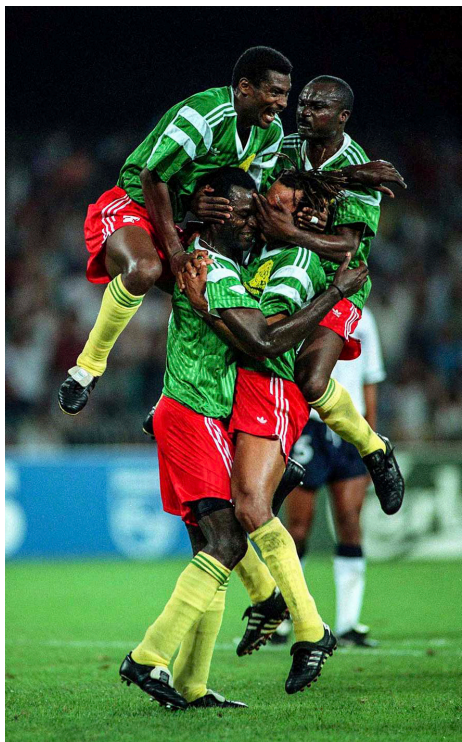
Months before, Fifa had rented office space on the 17th floor of Trump Tower in New York. It remains largely unused, according to *The New York Times*, but the payments benefit Trump’s family.

Infantino has praised Trump and appeared with him at many public events in this charm offensive. *The Athletic* reports he has visited the Oval Office more than any global political leader during Trump’s second term.

Trump was right in one respect. Even before the first whistle, the 2026 World Cup is setting a record: for poor treatment of fans, players, managers, and journalists trying to enter the country.

Artan’s ordeal was just one of many.

The US refused to give full visas to Iran’s national team, whose group stage matches are taking place in Seattle and California. The team was forced



**Benissimo:** Cameroon players celebrate becoming the first African team to reach the World Cup quarterfinals, in Italy in 1990.

PHOTOS: BILLY STICKLAND/INPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

to relocate its training camp to Mexico and was offered what amounted to day passes into the US. Iranian players would be allowed entry on matchdays and required to leave immediately afterwards, conditions no other team would be subjected to. Only after a public outcry did the US relent, allowing the team to arrive a day before each fixture.

Members of the Senegal and



***Above:** Egypt became the first African team to qualify for the World Cup in 1934.*

***Left:** Néjib Ghommidh manoeuvres around Mexico's Eduardo Ramos to score for Tunisia in their 1978 World Cup clash, which Tunisia went on to win 3-1.*



PHOTO (LEFT): IVE/AP

Uzbekistan squads were subjected to intrusive searches on airport tarmac. In Uzbekistan's case, sniffer dogs were brought in to inspect players and staff.

Scottish fans who had already paid for tickets, flights, and accommodation had their travel permits revoked just days before departure.

Many journalists, particularly those from Africa, were either denied visas altogether or issued single-entry visas

for a tournament spread across three countries: the US, Mexico, and Canada.

"Politicians always say that sport unites and builds bridges," wrote Gianni Merlo, president of the International Sports Press Association, in a complaint to Fifa. "In this case, we are going in the opposite direction."

This World Cup is also shaping up to be the most expensive in history. Tickets range from \$60 to more than



PHOTO: EBRAHIM NOBOZI/AP

**Stars aligned:** Fans wait for the start of their team's match against Netherlands at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha during the Fifa World Cup in 2022, during which Qatar provided free public transport.

\$10,000 depending on the stage of the tournament, pricing out many fans. Hotel room rates have surged from about \$150 to nearly \$390 a night in some of the host cities.

A 30-minute train ride from New York City to MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, where the final will be held, was initially priced at \$150, up from the usual \$13. After public backlash, the fare was reduced to \$98. In stark contrast, match tickets for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar included free public transport.

### **It wasn't always like this**

The US was not always a terrible host. The last World Cup it hosted remains

one of the tournament's great success stories, by Fifa's own reckoning. That 1994 tournament set attendance records that still stand today.

In more recent tournaments, host countries have often gone to extraordinary lengths to make the tournament accessible.

South Africa introduced special measures to fast-track visas, work permits, and licensing approvals ahead of the 2010 World Cup.

Brazil passed legislation guaranteeing public funding for Fan Fest sites for the 2014 tournament. Russia issued personalised "Fan IDs" that doubled as a visa waiver for the 2018 World Cup.



*Above:* In 2010, South Africa became the first African country to host the World Cup.

*Right:* In 2022, Morocco became the first country from Africa to make the semifinals of a World Cup.

PHOTO 1: ISSOUF SANOGO/AFP  
PHOTO 2: ALVARO BARRIENTOS/AP



Qatar, which does not officially recognise Israel, opened a temporary consular arrangement and facilitated direct flights from Tel Aviv to allow Israeli fans to attend the 2022 tournament.

Fifa itself has not always been passive when host countries put domestic politics over tournament accessibility.

The governing body responded to Artan's denial of entry by saying it is "not involved in host country immigration processes, including visa adjudications".

But in 2023, when Indonesia objected to Israel's participation in the Under-20 World Cup, Fifa swiftly stripped the

country of hosting rights.

This time, however, Infantino has asked football supporters to "chill, relax", and trust Fifa, while also admitting the governing body is not being told about decisions affecting its own tournament.

The 2026 World Cup had the potential to be truly historic. It is the first time the tournament has been held in three countries. Several countries – including Cabo Verde, Curaçao, Jordan, and Uzbekistan – are making their World Cup debuts.

So far, however, the history it is making is joyless and off the pitch. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

# Homecoming dance

WORDS AND PHOTOS: SOGO OLADELE





LAGOS urban culture has always been at the centre of Nigerian entertainment and pop culture, with its influence spreading across Africa and the diaspora.

It is this culture that influenced Qudus Onikeku's *Re:Incarnation*. For the first time since it first debuted in France more than five years ago, the show has returned to the city that inspired it.

As much as Lagosians love to dance, the art form has generally struggled to attract audiences. It was the desire to change this that motivated leading dance artist Onikeku to return to Nigeria, where he is curating a series of contemporary dance art showcases.

*Re:Incarnation* is a performance piece that's rooted in Yoruba traditional cosmology that life is a continuous cycle.

The choreography explores the impact of colonialism on Africa, as well

as the possibility of carving a future free of that baggage — a future both authentic and whole. The performance takes the audience through three stages of life: birth, death, and rebirth.

Reflecting on why it's taken so many years of touring different countries for the show to be performed in Lagos, Onikeku said the absence of the right infrastructure to foster a performance of this magnitude had always been an obstacle. To make *Re:Incarnation* possible, Onikeku's company had to build everything themselves, the stage included.

As the three-day event began, the central question was whether a local audience would turn out for such a performance. By the final day, the enthusiastic response provided a definitive answer: Lagos is more than ready for the art of dance. ■





## FEATURE

# Pan Africa: Broken by gold's promise

Four years after Uganda promised its artisanal miners a pathway to formalisation, many remain locked out.



PHOTO: NICHOLAS BAMULANZEKI/AP

**Pay dirt:** Artisanal gold miners pull pans of sludge to sift from a shaft in Mawero, eastern Uganda.

**SOITA K WEPUKHULU AND  
EMMANUEL MUTAIZIBWA**

ARTISANAL and small-scale miners produce about 90% of Uganda's gold, according to the United Nations Development Programme. In the wider minerals sector, these miners account for 60% of the country's mining workforce.

To stay in the game, they typically pool equipment and land. They also form labour associations to mimic the economies of scale that give

formal companies an edge.

In 2022, Uganda sought to give them a proper leg up by reforming colonial-era laws that favoured formal – and often foreign – operators. So the government created artisanal and small-scale mining-licence categories reserved for Ugandan citizens.

Four years on, in Kassanda and Busia – Uganda's top two gold-producing regions – only four miners' associations have received a licence. Miners say the law reforms created financial and

bureaucratic barriers that have made informality the only real option most of them have.

In Tiira, where gold has been mined since the 1930s, Aroba Matthias has been trying to do exactly what Uganda's Mining and Minerals Act of 2022 asked of artisanal miners: organise, register, and apply for a licence.

"Despite great efforts, we have not been able to get a licence under this law," he said. Aroba is one of the leaders of Tiira Small-scale Miners Association (Tisma) in Busia district, along Uganda's eastern border with Kenya.

"This law gives with the right hand and takes with the other," said Josephine Aguttu, another Tisma leader.

Many miners initially welcomed the reforms, according to Paul Angeso, chairperson of Tiira Landlords and Artisanal Mining Association (Tlama).

"The first laws that were made were colonial laws. We asked the government to make laws that suit us," he said.

The 2022 law promised a reset better suited for a post-colonial economy. But it may have overestimated the health of that economy.

It costs 10-million Ugandan shillings (\$2,800) to apply for or renew a small-scale mining licence. That's on top of expensive land and surface rights and company registration fees.

Applicants must also prove – by paying for professional audits and services – that they are technically competent, comply with environmental regulations, keep good accounts and have sound marketing plans.

John-Bosco Bukya, chairperson of the Uganda Association of Artisanal and Small-scale Miners and the Mubende United Miners Assembly (Muma) in Kassanda district complained about the bureaucratic nature of licensing.

Acquiring a certificate to confirm environmental compliance is expensive. Tisma said one consultant demanded 45-million Ugandan shillings (about \$13,000) to conduct the required assessment.

Many associations find they need external investment when they attempt the formalisation process, because Ugandans with enough money are hard to find.

### **Tisma said one consultant demanded 45-million Ugandan shillings to conduct the required assessment.**

Yet, because small-scale licences are reserved for Ugandan citizens and entities they control, accepting foreign capital – which is more readily available – can make the association ineligible for the very licence it is trying to obtain.

That is what happened to Tlama. The association, founded in 2017, had long hoped to expand beyond mining open-cast pits to more expensive underground mining, which required more technical expertise than it could afford.

It accepted cash injections from a Ugandan company and, when that was not enough, Chinese partners too. In the end, Tlama members now hold just

30% of the joint venture. Tlama was then forced to pursue a more expensive and complex mining licence.

Today, the venture has rights to a 16-hectare site. Its steel shafts and new ore-processing sheds stand in contrast to the hand-dug shafts used by neighbouring miners.

Tlama members are expecting high returns when gold mining eventually restarts, in part because its Chinese partners also brought technical expertise for specialised underground and processing work.

But other associations are wary of following in Tlama's footsteps. Tisma is looking for investors, but Aguttu said the association will take outside capital only if local miners retain control, with a 51% stake in a joint venture.

In Kassanda district, Muma is one of the few associations to have successfully secured a licence without outside investors – by forming a conglomerate of 23 miners' associations. Collectively, they have nearly 3,000 members.

Muma members have some buyer's remorse about formalisation, because they now pay more tax.

Still, "we prefer being compliant because even then the business remains profitable", Bukya said. They earn more now because they can sell their gold into formal markets, including to Uganda's central bank.

But Muma remains the exception rather than the norm. Only three other associations in Kassanda have received licences, none of them in Busia.

Artisanal miners who remain informal



PHOTO: BADRU KATUMBA / THE CONTINENT

**Hand to mouth:** Artisanal miners are wary of formal ventures while corruption remains rife.

are governed by another – still expensive – system: graft.

Several miners accused mineral police officers of harassing unlicensed miners and soliciting bribes. Even then, many miners viewed those bribes as a cheaper and easier alternative to the licensing expenses and process.

That's a problem for the Ugandan government, which had its own motivations for a path to legality: improving oversight, increasing tax collection, and bringing gold production into traceable, legal supply chains at a time of growing concern over illicit gold flows linked to smuggling and organised criminal networks.

The government has said mining is crucial to its broader plan to grow the economy from \$50-billion in 2023 to \$500-billion by 2040.

But, as Bukya warns, "You cannot milk a cow you cannot feed." ■

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This story is published in collaboration with Finance Uncovered, a UK journalism organisation.

DATA

# Refugees and refusers

AFRICA is home to 10-million refugees and asylum seekers. They are fleeing conflict, persecution, natural disasters, and various other circumstances. Another one million people are stateless, and there are 35-million internally displaced people.

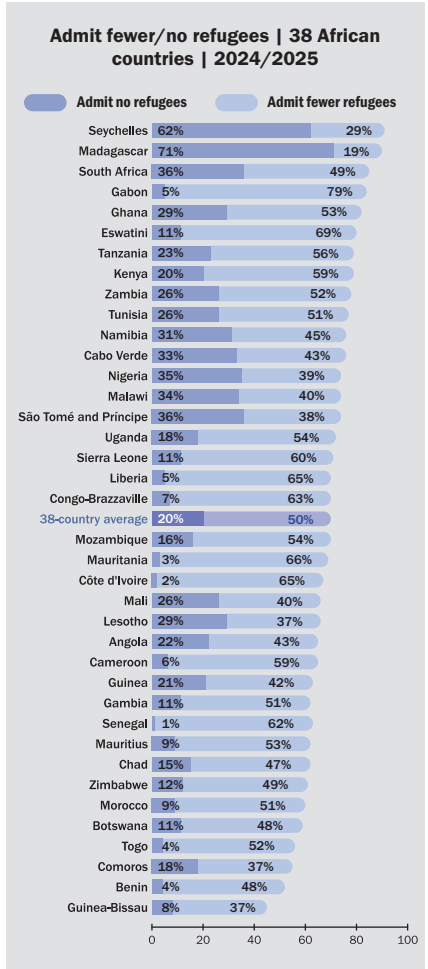
These numbers are on the rise as crises around the continent worsen.

Next week, on 20 June, it's World Refugee Day. With that in mind, we ask: How welcoming are Africans to refugees?

In 35 of the 38 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2024/2025, majorities say they would like or wouldn't mind living next door to refugees. On the other end of the spectrum, the notable exceptions are South Africa (45%), Tanzania (45%), and Madagascar (29%).

But whereas 69% of Africans express tolerance toward refugees, only 28% are willing to let them enter their country in current or greater numbers. Guinea-Bissau (52%) is the only country where a majority would lay down the welcome mat for asylum seekers.

On average, seven in 10 respondents want fewer refugees (50%) or none at all (20%). This stance is strongest in two Indian Ocean countries: Seychelles (91%) and Madagascar (90%). ■





## MUSIC REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE



### Africa's diva reheats her beats

Angélique Kidjo might not stray far from her familiar recipes, but when she cooks, we eat.

FIVE-TIME Grammy award winner Angélique Kidjo offers a collection of jubilant new tracks with her new studio record, dedicated to her late mother.

*Hope!!* advances the cross-cultural, genre-hopping formula Kidjo first perfected with 2007's *Djin Djin*, which turned the Beninese diva into a global

icon. The boisterous album is also Kidjo's response to the troubled times we live in.

From the buoyancy of opener *Bando*, with Pharell and rapper Quavo, to the Diane Warren-penned *Sunlight to My Soul* (with the Soweto Gospel Choir), Kidjo's message is positive, wrapped in a polished production package.

The lyrics are uplifting and lean into sentimentality, although sometimes Kidjo carries this a step too far and into maudlin territory, as in the cheesy power ballad *You Can*, an admission of failure addressed to her daughter's generation.

Still, Kidjo's supremacy has always been rooted in adventure: Some of her most impressive work (*Celia*, *Remain in Light*) reclaims the African foundations embedded in the music of legacy acts like Celia Cruz and Talking Heads.

Though she has flirted with Afrobeats in the past, Kidjo maintains a disciplined distance from the genre here. It serves her well, allowing for an authoritative command of her own sound.

Ayra Starr brings verve to the shimmering *Aye Kan* and alt acts The Cavemen supply the underlying heat to the restless *I'm On Fire*.

Kidjo knows the formulas that work. In *Big Heart*, she reworks the melody of her 1991 hit *We We*. She closes with another rendition of the Swahili classic *Malaika*, this time as a lush duet with French singer Florent Pagny. ■

# The Quiz

- 1 In which city is Soccer City stadium (pictured) located?
- 2 What is the nickname of Egypt's national men's football team?
- 3 The ouguiya (made up of five khoums) is the currency of which country?
- 4 What is Mauritius's currency called?
- 5 The star on Senegal's flag is red. True or false?
- 6 How many World Cups has Angola's men's football team qualified for?
- 7 Ciudad de la Paz is which country's (new) capital city?
- 8 Which country is the legendary song *Premier Gaou* (by Magic System) from?
- 9 Which African country does NBA player Victor Wembanyama have familial ties with?
- 10 In which country was Angélique Kidjo born?



## HOW DID I DO?

**WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!**

**0-3**

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

**4-7**

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

**8-10**

"Cost to watch a World Cup match? Ask a pay-per-view seller. If the price is not so nice, neither's my vuvuzela."

PHOTO: SIPHIWE SIBEKO/REUTERS

# Big Pic

**Grand opening:** Football fans in Cairo, Egypt, watch the opening game of the Fifa World Cup 2026 between Mexico and South Africa on Thursday evening. Bafana Bafana were ungovernable and Mexico romped home 2-0.

PHOTO: MAHMOUD KHALED/AP



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