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Press Statement: For Immediate release

“A media black-out slapped on the Uganda Police due to worsening brutality against journalists in the country.” Media body announces.

We are rattled by the savage and unprovoked police assault on journalists in the line of duty.

On Monday, January 12, 2015, the Division Police Commander (DPC) for Old Kampala Police Station, Joram Mwesigye rampaged against journalists covering a youth demonstration in the capital, Kampala. He struck a Wavah Broadcasting Services (WBS) Television cameraman, Lwanga Andrew, with an electric cable on the head and the journalist blacked out.

The uniformed police officer randomly clobbered journalists with electric cables and in a wild anger drove a car with the aim of knocking those who escaped his lashes. He threatened to shoot broadcasters filming his assault.

Instead of transporting the bleeding journalist to hospital, DPC Mwesigye and officers under his command squeezed Lwanga into a car, Registration UAT 150L and heartlessly dumped him in a dirty room at Old Kampala Police Station.

Following a petition by other journalists, the Regional Police Commander James Ruhweza, who supervises Mwesigye, later drove the victim to Mulago National Referral Hospital where he was admitted in a critical condition. Mwesigye also smashed Lwanga’s video camera.

Mwesigye assaulted another journalist, Joseph Ssettimba, who works with the government-owned Vision Group’s Bukedde Television. He beat him with an electric cable which hooked and tore the journalist’s trousers, exposing his underwear. Ssettimba’ video camera too was destroyed. He filed a case of assault and malicious damage to property at the Central Police Station –Kampala.

A digital recorder of a third journalist, Herbert Zziwa working K-FM Radio -a Nation Media Group-owned station, was damaged. Zziwa told Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda that Mwesigye threatened to shoot him, but could not find his pistol when he reached for it.

This monstrous attack by uniformed police officers, whose constitutional mandate is to protect life and property, lasted for about 10 minutes.

The journalists were covering a peaceful demonstration by a group of unemployed youths marching to the police headquarters at Naguru, a city suburb, to petition the Inspector General of Police, Gen. Kale Kayihura. Police arrested some of the demonstrators and confiscated their placards.

The Uganda Police Force has for the last four years emerged as the worst violators of media freedom and journalists' rights in the country, according to reports compiled by HRNJ-Uganda, despite repeated assurances by the police leadership to stem violence against journalists.

Given the enunciated gross misconduct and abuse of the uniform of Armed Services of the Republic of Uganda, we therefore resolve as follows:

1. Slap a total media blackout on all activities of or by the Uganda Police Force until DPC Mwesigye is punitive action is taken. This blackout starts with immediate effect.
2. Demand that Police Disciplinary Committee suspends DPC Mwesigye with immediate effect, and commences investigations into his conduct.
3. Instituting criminal cases against DPC Mwesigye and his officers who assaulted the journalists in broad day light.
4. Instituting a civil suit against Mwesigye and his men who violently attacked the journalists.
5. Petition the Police Council over the Force' heightened brutality.
6. Petition the line minister in charge of the Uganda Police Force –Internal Affairs.
7. Politicians and other leaders should desist from making and promoting hate speech against free and independent media in the country.
8. Most importantly, the victims should not cut back-door deals with Uganda Police Force because that undermines justice, frustrates those volunteering legal/profession services and doesn't act as a deterrent for other officers.

Implementation of all these resolutions will be incumbent upon the police's reaction to the situation at hand. Meanwhile, we appeal to all media houses and journalists to continue exposing the force by reporting about their bad deeds during the blackout cover.

For God and Country

Robert Ssempala
National Coordinator

