

06<sup>th</sup> JULY 2015

**Press Statement: For Immediate release.**

Status of HRNJ-Uganda after office break-in

**ENTRY:** The offices of Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda), located at Plot 18, Kayanja Triangle Zone, in Rubaga Division, Kampala district were raided and broken in on the night of Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015. The attackers cut the burglary proof of the window on the National Coordinator's office, and entered there to access the rest of the department offices inside the premises. They forced open the doors to the legal department, accounts office, program Manager's office and through to the front desk office.

**DAMAGE OCCASSIONED:** The Organization has lost a lot of vital information and equipment which included four desktops, a laptop, money safe box, cash of about five million shillings, over 100 company labeled pens, travel documents, project related information, three drawers that were forced open and broken in the process, and a set of office keys. In all the affected offices, we found most of the documents scattered on the floor, which means the attackers could have been looking for specific information. Razor wire mesh at the perimeter wall was cut. The money-safe was recovered at Rubaga police post by one of our staff who had gone there to report the case. It had been vandalized. Police told us that it had been vandalized and abandoned near the Rubaga Cathedral graveyard. We are yet to see the statements of the people who reportedly informed the police about the abandoned safe.

**POLICE INVESTIGATIONS:** The raid was discovered on the morning of Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, by one of the staff members who had come to open the offices, only to realize that the window had been broken. When he returned to the gate to report the incident to the guard who was on duty that fateful night, she had run away, leaving her gun behind in the security Guard's booth. The matter was reported to Rubaga police post, and immediately detectives from Rubaga, Lungujja police station and Old Kampala police division showed up at the premises, recorded statements of all the staff, and took their finger prints as well. They took the abandoned gun and other exhibits recovered at the scene. To the best of our knowledge, no arrests have been made so far.

**SECURITY FIRM:** Detail Protection Services located at Mengo is our security service provider. They informed us that they had furnished police with all the detailed information, but the guard has not yet been found. We have written to the firm requesting for compensation for the loss occasioned as a result of negligence and/or possible connivance of the officer of the security firm.**ANALYSIS OF THE RAID:** We cannot rule out foul play since more valuable equipment such as printers, a projector, a closed photocopier, and other items were not taken, but information related equipment was all taken. Adding to our suspicion is the fact that this is the second raid on our offices in a space of two years, the first one having taken place in May 2013 at our former premises along Kivebulaya road at Mengo. Prior to that, there had been several attempts to break in that were foiled by the armed guard.

In the recent past, the country has witnessed numerous rights-based non-governmental organizations offices broken into in Uganda and useful information and property lost. According to NGO-Forum, over 15 offices of human rights organizations have been broken into under similar circumstances in the recent

past. They include; ACCU, FHRI, EHAHRDP, AGHA, HRNJ-Uganda, AFODE, HURINET-Uganda, ACME, among others.

**STATUS OF HRNJ-Uganda:** Due to the raid on our offices, the operations at the Secretariat were fundamentally affected. Some staff members became scared for their lives, although they all continue to work. We are going to enhance physical security around the premises.

Although a lot of information was lost, the damage was not dire simply because we had backed up all the information, as well encrypted the lost information.

**TOTAL LOSS:** The total loss occasioned to the Organization was estimated at over forty million shillings (USD 12,500). We have since re-opened the office and resumed our work of defending and promoting media freedoms and journalists' rights in Uganda.

**WAY FORWARD:**

1. We appeal to the police to expeditiously and thoroughly investigate into this office raid. We want to see the investigation report as it's made available as soon as possible to enable us and other potential future victims take appropriate precautions to put an end to this menace
2. Together with other human rights organizations, we will petition Parliament with a view of moving it to commission investigations into the rampant break-ins at human rights offices
3. We will not yield to intimidation and harassment to back step from the defense and promotion work on behalf of victimized journalists.

We call upon all journalists and other human rights defenders to be more vigilant with their personal and office safety and security as we approach the peak of general elections in the country

For God and My Country



ROBERT SEMPALA

NATIONAL COORDINATOR