



# HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

*In Defence & Promotion of Freedom of Expression, Information & Media Freedom*

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup>/January/2016

**Press statement: For Immediate Release**

## ***'Media Under Persecution during Campaign Period'***

**Kampala, 20<sup>th</sup>, January, 2016;** The government should not abdicate its responsibility of ensuring free flow of information, ideas and opinions during this period of elections by turning a blind eye as journalists are harassed, intimidated and physically attacked by police and politicians together with their supporters. Some contestants have been denied to air out their views through the media. The Ugandan government has a constitutional obligation to respect, fulfill and protect the rights of all Ugandans at all times irrespective of the dissenting views they may hold.

Human Rights Network for Journalists–Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) is concerned about increased unnecessary and unwarranted interference with the work of the media in general and journalists in particular by police, Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) and politicians majorly from the ruling party. Practicing journalism in Uganda has become life threatening where some journalists have been shot at while in the course of duty.

Between October 2015 and January 2016, HRNJ-Uganda has documented about 40 election-related incidents in which journalists have been shot at, assaulted, their gadgets damaged, detained and released without charge and blocked from accessing news scenes. Of all the occurrences, Police is responsible for 28 of them -majority of which are assault and malicious damage to property. In some cases politicians from the ruling party have beaten journalists during campaigns, damaging their gadgets and police has looked on even where cases have been reported.

On 28th October 2015, Shamim Jjingo Nakawooya of the Daily Monitor in Masaka was assaulted by one Eddie Ssansa who was contesting to be the National Resistance Movement flag bearer for a parliamentary seat in Lwengo District. She was slapped on the cheeks, her breasts were fondled and her smart phone smashed. A case of assault and malicious damage to property is going on in court at Masaka.

On 14th January 2016, Kajubi Tahika was assaulted by one Mukasa Julius Opondo, an NRM Parliamentary contestant for Bujumba County in Kalangala District.

Other victim journalists include, Ronald Galiwango–NTV, Julius Ssenkandwa-NTV, Jjingo Francis–NTV, Harunah Mugerwa-Bukedde TV, Joseph Ssabiiti-NBS TV, Ali Golooba-Buddu FM, Bahati Remmy-NBS TV, Nankanja Prossy-Arua One, Micheal Tumwakire-Tv West Mbarara, Isaac Kugonza-Delta TV, Ivan Vincent Mukisa-Radio One, Alfred Ochwol-The Observer, Kenny Kazibwe-Chipreports, Enoch Matove-NTV Mityana, Kenneth Oryema-New Vision Moroto, etc

Recently, two senior editors of the Red Pepper and Kamunye Ben Baryabaha and Mubiru Dickson respectively were summoned to the Special Investigations Unit in Kireka and detained for publishing a story titled “Aine ‘body’ emerges”. The editors were detained incommunicado and later released without any charge.

Kampala witnessed the majority incidents with 14, followed by Gulu with 7, Moroto with 4, Lwengo with 3. Other incident happened in Jinja, Mityana, Kibaale, Nebbi, Kalangala, Arua and Lwengo among others.

HRNJ-Uganda has noted that the election period is becoming more hostile for journalists covering election campaigns country wide. The attacks on the journalists are intended to suffocate journalists’ rights, freedom of expression and media rights that are provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

HRNJ-Uganda has also learnt that journalists particularly those hosting political talk –shows and their producers are under pressure from their supervisors not to give platform to Members of Parliament and individuals with views divergent from government. These actors are currently facing threats of closure or suspension of their operating licenses. It is now becoming criminal to host or provide a platform to those considered “anti, rebel or indisciplined” politicians.

#### ***ACCREDITATION AND CLOSURE OF PRESS OFFICE:***

HRNJ-Uganda is equally alarmed by the sudden closure and eviction of journalists under the Uganda Parliamentary Press Association from their press office at Parliament and directive to the editors to nominate only degree holders with a three year working experience to cover the proceedings of the tenth Parliament. On 11th January 2016, the Clerk to Parliament issued a directive to editors of various media houses to send names of only journalists with a minimum qualification a Degree and three years working experience for accreditation to cover Parliament.

This came after the same clerk to Parliament issued a ban that took effect on 1st May 2015 barring fifty three (53) journalists who had reported for more than five years from further coverage of the Parliament.

These actions not only violate the constitutionally guaranteed rights to freedom of the press, but affect the professional development opportunities for the parliamentary reporters. The actions further disenfranchise many media houses and journalists who are not degree holders the right to practice their profession as enshrined under Article 40(2) of the Constitution of Uganda.

It is in light of this therefore that HRNJ-Uganda, in conjunction with UPPA and Legal Brains Trust are opposed to such conspiracies to muzzle the media, and are therefore supporting a case in the High Court to that effect.

### ***Save Journalist Andrew Lwanga Campaign:***

Andrew Lwanga was assaulted while on duty on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015 by the then DPC of Old Kampala police division, Joram Mwesigye. He has been hospitalised at Mulago National Referral Hospital, St. Peters Nsambya, African Center for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV) and Norvik hospital. He is still battling for his life, he urgently needs to be operated on, at a cost of USD50,000 which his family and friends cannot afford. A fundraising campaign dubbed ‘#SaveAndrew. Stand with a journalist injured on the line of duty’ was therefore launched to raise the said money. Generous contributions via mobile money to Shamim Bataliwo 0786202674, Ben Kerry Mawejeje 0752438452 or Account Number 1035100839726 at Equity Bank in the names of Andrew Lwanga Kisegerwa.

### **Way forward:**

1. Parliament should immediately re-open the press office at Parliament
2. Parliament should desist from taking actions against reporters at Parliament without due consultations with the media leadership at the various levels.
3. Police should investigate and for purposes of taking to court the perpetrators of violence against media practitioners
4. The Electoral Commission should come out over candidates who persecute journalists
5. The police should ensure the safety and security of journalists irrespective of the media house they work for
6. Media practitioners should desist from taking partisan lines of reporting about the various political candidates
7. Political contestants should desist from making attacking and intimidating statements against the media.
8. Journalists should remain objective and fair, but critical when reporting about the political contestants



**Robert Sempala**  
**National Coordinator**