



# HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

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Press Statement: For Immediate Release

***“Ruling party should desist from targeting critical and independent reporting of the political campaigns in the run upto the general elections”*** says HRNJ-Uganda

Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) is distressed by the complaint lodged before the statutory Media Council, by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party against the *Daily Monitor* publication over a news story attributed to the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) presidential candidate, Dr. Kizza Besigye alleging that the NRM government has been the most corrupt since independence. Uganda has had eight governments since it attained her independence in 1962.

On February 9<sup>th</sup> 2016, the Director NRM Legal department, James Mukasa Sebugenyi, petitioned the Media Council over the *Daily Monitor* story published on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016, under the title: ‘*NRM most corrupt government -Besigye,*’ in which Besigye was quoted alleging that “since independence, there is no government that has been as corrupt as this...” The ruling party accuses *Daily Monitor* of “false, reckless and exaggerated unfair reporting by a news paper.” The party contends that such “reckless reporting at this time has irreparable damage and ought to be controlled,” by the Media Council.

The complaint by the NRM is devoid of merit and substance, solely intended to stifle, intimidate and silence the *Daily Monitor newspaper* and other media houses from fulfilling their obligation of delivering information without fear or favor in the public domain. It is aimed at instilling fear and self-censorship among journalists and media houses engaged in critical and independent reporting of divergent views during this campaign period.

The role of the *Daily Monitor* in particular and the media in general, in a pluralistic society, is not only to report what is favorable to the ruling party or any other political organization but also to disseminate information which may even be disturbing and annoying to certain sections of the society. That's what is meant by freedom of expression and free flow of information and ideas in a free and democratic society.

HRNJ-Uganda appeals to the ruling party and all other political players to desist from silencing divergent views by using intimidating tactics; they should rather resort to explaining situations by offering in detail what they deem to be the rightful information. The NRM should seek for space in the *Daily Monitor* and use it to give plausible responses to the said allegations rather than stifling the free flow of information to the public.

In 2013, the government closed down the *Daily Monitor*, its sister radio stations KFM and Dembe FM and the Red Pepper over a controversial letter authored by the former Coordinator of Intelligence services, Gen. David Sejusa, alleging a scheme to assassinate government officials opposed to the president's son from succeeding him as president.

Earlier this year, the NRM party banned Daily Monitor's sister television, NTV Uganda from covering its flag bearer, President Yoweri Museveni's campaign rallies on allegations of declining to use campaign footage captured by other sources other than the television journalists attached to covering Museveni's campaign trail.

HRNJ-Uganda has documented over 40 election related abuses and violations committed against various media houses and independent journalists since the political campaigns begun late last year.

“The media plays a very crucial role in entrenching a systematic and progressing democratic society, and therefore the need to ensure its conducive working environment, most importantly as they cover this political campaign.” Said the HRNJ-Uganda National Coordinator, Robert Ssempala.