



# HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

26<sup>th</sup> February 2016

## **WORRYING TRENDS OF JOURNALISTS TARGETED FOR COVERING POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN UGANDA**

**Human Rights Network for Journalists–Uganda** (HRNJ-Uganda) is a network of human rights journalists in Uganda working towards enhancing the promotion, protection and respect of human rights through defending and building the capacities of journalists. It was registered in 2006 amidst glaring abuses targeting the media and deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

HRNJ-U monitors and documents journalists' rights, violations and abuses in Uganda and contributes towards the realization of media freedoms and good governance in the country.

HRNJ-Uganda has been monitoring and observing the rights of journalists, their safety and security during the electioneering period. We paid particular attention to whether journalists were free to gather and impart information without unnecessary interference, intimidation or obstruction.

We noticed that although the presidential, parliamentary and district council elections were generally peaceful, there were several violations and unnecessary interference in the work of journalists and media houses, such as; destruction of journalistic tools, physical assault, intimidation and closure of a media house. HRNJ-Uganda recorded at least seventy (70) cases; which also included three alleged shootings at reporters.

### **ASSAULT VICTIMS:**

Between October 2015 and February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016, seventeen (17) journalists were assaulted by contestants, their supporters, Police and UPDF Special Forces Command.

On February 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, Margaret Kayondo, a correspondent of Radio Simba in Sembabule was assaulted by four UPDF officers while covering a scuffle between NRM supporters and the police in Lwemiyaga, Sembabule District. Her audio recorder and smart phone which she was using to take pictures were confiscated. They deleted all the recorded material from the recorder and the phone.

On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2016, Golooba Ali of Buddu FM in Masaka was battered by the private guards of Hajji Muyanja Mbabali 'the NRM Member of Parliament elect for Bukoto South constituency in Masaka District.

On the Election Day -18<sup>th</sup> February 2016, Latiff Maganda of Step Radio and TV in Mbale and Denis Oluka –the Bureau Chief of Uganda Radio Network in Mbale were mobbed allegedly by supporters of the NRM Bulambuli District Woman Member of Parliament elect, Sarah Wekomba.

On 16<sup>th</sup> November 2015, Isaac Kugonza of Delta TV was shot on the head by police as they stopped and arrested the Lord Mayor Elias Lukwago from going to the Electoral Commission seeking for clarification on Mayoral nominations. The other victim journalists were Enoch Matovu of NTV based in Mityana and Radio One' Mukisa Vincent based in Jinja.

On 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2016, a security officer in civilian clothes pepper sprayed Isaac Kasamani –a correspondent for AFP while he was covering the arrest of Dr. Kizza Besigye at Kasangati, Wakiso district. The DPC for Kasangati police, James Kawalya declined to reveal the identity of the officer, but instead blaming journalists for disobeying security orders not to access the Besigye arrest news. As a result, the police is threatening with arrest to all journalists who demanded that Kawalya reveals the identity of the culprit. Most foreign correspondents have since fled Uganda in fear of arrest.

Of the eighteen assault cases recorded, only one case is being prosecuted and police has not effectively investigated the rest despite the fact that they were reported to them.

### **MALICIOUS DAMAGE:**

Twelve (12) cases of malicious damage to property and confiscation of journalistic tools were also recorded during the electioneering period. On 10<sup>th</sup> January 2016, Ronald Galiwango of NTV had his camera confiscated by the District Police Commander of Moroto George Obia while he was covering the opposition presidential candidate Dr. Kizza Besigye's campaigns. Other journalists whose tools were confiscated by the same police officer include; Ernest Kyazze of Bukedde TV, Julius Ariongo -a Daily Monitor correspondent in Moroto District had his camera savagely damaged. None of the cases has been investigated to their logical conclusion.

### **ARREST AND DETENTION:**

HRNJ-Uganda documented ten (10) cases of journalists arrested and detained over electoral related reporting. On 13<sup>th</sup> February, police in Lira raided Radio North, arrested and detained the editor, Richard Mungu Jakican with other six politicians who were discussing the presidential elections debate that was being relayed live from Kampala Serena Hotel. The police accused them of defacing candidate Museveni's campaign posters. Among them were parliamentary contestants on the Go Forward ticket. They were charged with malicious damage to property and granted bail after four days in detention. The affected radio station belongs to a Go Forward area mobilizer.

On 6<sup>th</sup> February 2016, police in Abim district, arrested three journalists including BBC's Catherine Byaruhanga, Kelvin Brown –who is based in Kenya and NTV' Sam Lawino while filming Abim hospital, they were forced to delete their footage before releasing them, but they declined. They were release after four hours without any charges preferred.

## **DENIAL OF ACCESS TO NEWS:**

HRNJ-Uganda recorded over thirty (30) cases in which journalists were blocked from covering events by police. Since Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> 2016, when Dr. Kizza Besigye was put under house arrest at his home in Kasangati, -Wakiso district, on different occasions the police and army forces have blocked over 20 local reporters and over 10 foreign correspondents and denied them access to covering the news of his arrest at a time when he tries to leave his home. No explanation is advanced by the security for denying journalists access to news coverage.

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016, police in Kalangala district stopped four (4) journalists from covering the arrest of a parliamentary contestant for Bujumba constituency. In January, NTV was barred from reporting about President Museveni's campaign rallies because they declined to a directive to use news video footage provided by the candidate's press team, reportedly captured by a drone.

## **THREATS AND INTIMIDATION:**

The Inspector General of Police, Gen. Kale Kayihura, senior police officers, political candidates and their supporters in different parts of the country together with H.E President Museveni and some ruling NRM party spokespersons have on several occasions threatened journalists over what they have termed as biased and unprofessional reporting of electoral issues, hence branding journalists as 'Rumor mongers, traitors, among others names. In October 2015, Gen Kayihura warned journalists against extensive coverage of the opposition, saying that "we are going to go after you". He was responding to media coverage of the alleged police undressing of an FDC activist during her arrest along Masaka-Mbarara road. The Arua District Police Commander, Jonathan Musinguzi threatened Arua One FM journalist as to why she "was moving with FDC politicians." In Iganga, a Parliamentary candidate for Kigulu North constituency, Kyakulaga Bwino Fred made calls and sent a threatening text message to a Red Pepper journalist on 5<sup>th</sup> February that "you are in for a shock of your life, watch this space" over a news story weighing the performance and rating of the candidates in the race. Although the matter was reported to police, no investigations have been carried out.

On 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016, Endigyito FM in Western Uganda was switched off by the State broadcasting regulator, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) under unclear circumstances. The radio had just hosted former Prime Minister of Uganda and Presidential candidate John Patrick Amama Mbabazi.

## **ELECTORAL COMMISSION:**

During the elections, journalists did not encounter difficulties in accessing polling stations for news in spite of the earlier orders issued by the chairperson of Electoral Commission (EC) not to access polling stations with their phones and recording gadgets. Many interviewed said the returning officers were cooperative and readily gave information. However in Lwengo district the Returning Officer cancelled accreditation of a Bukedde TV journalist accusing her of being biased in her reporting. It was only re-instated after intervention by fellow colleagues and other players.

The EC however did not come out strongly on the persistent attacks and intimidation of the media by candidates and their supporters during the campaign period. This escalated attacks on journalists by candidates and their supporters.

### **IN A NUT SHELL:**

Majority of the victim journalists and media houses were targeted while on duty reporting opposition related activities. The police and NRM candidates and or with their supporters took a lion's share in violating the media and journalists rights and freedoms. Majority of these cases were reported to authorities like police but barely investigated.

The human rights situation therefore remains fragile, the State and its operatives continue to violate journalists' and peoples' rights with impunity.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS;**

1. The Electoral commission should come out strongly to ensure that candidates respect the rights and freedoms of the media. In the same vein, EC should also desist from passing unfair regulations against the media which inhibit a free operating environment.
2. Political candidates together with their supporters should desist from targeting journalists and media houses during campaigns and elections season.
3. The police should arrest, investigate and take to court perpetrators of violence and threats against journalists and media houses during political campaigns
4. The police and army should desist from targeting journalists and media houses giving coverage to the opposition and other dissenting views
5. The media should remain fair, balanced and objective to all candidates during the campaigns. The media should also be united to defend their rights and freedoms during such times.
6. The Donor, Diplomatic and International community should ensure that the State respects and promotes media rights and freedoms at all times

Given the crucial role played by the media in entrenching true democracy, all the various stakeholders should work hand in hand to create a conducive operating environment.



**ROBERT SSEMPALA**

**NATIONAL COORDINATOR**