



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

26th July, 2016

Press Statement: For Immediate Release

“Media Not Fighting the police, government but for its space”

On Saturday 23rd July, 2016, the Inspector General of Police, Gen Kale Kayihura characterized the media as an enemy force, working with politicians for his downfall. He attacked the media for concentrating on reporting hatred and negativity to which he invited government to take a firm stand against urging that national stability could not be achieved when the media is operating in machination, prejudice, unprofessionalism. Kayihura argues that that media houses should be penalized or have their operating licenses revoked.

Gen. Kayihura made these deafening remarks while launching a face-lift project of police stations in Uganda, at Jinja Road police Station which is supported by ruling NRM party vice chairman for Eastern Region Mike Mukula. He said that he had listened to the media propagating statements that he should be sacked. He described such reporting as corruption and a disservice.

As a media rights body, we are grossly aggrieved by the persistent and systematic attacks –both verbal and physical to the media. Whenever police is caught in the act of using excessive force and meting violence against media practitioners, the police through its police spokesperson and the IGP have rushed to heap the blame on the media, accusing the practitioners of doctoring the news to blackmail and cast the police in bad light.

The police force has never on any occasion produced alternative footage or recording to substantiate such claims, despite consistent calls from media development organisations and other players to do so.

The statements by Gen. Kayihura cannot be taken lightly, given the fact that the police has been the leading violator of media rights according to the HRNJ-Uganda Press Freedom Index Reports since 2010 to date. Such statements are setting up over zealous police and security agents against media practitioners.

Gen. Kayihura should appreciate that ugly scenes involving the police are captured by the media as they happen at the hands of his officers, some of who are being tried at the Professional Standards Unit. So Kayihura should not aim his guns at shooting the messenger, but rather move fast to restrain his errant officers from creating such scenes that bring the Uganda Police’s image in disgrace.

If the IGP is aggrieved by the works of the media, he should resort to courts of law for legal redress rather than lambasting the media houses in general without singling out individual media houses or journalists, so that their plight can be heard in a court of competent jurisdiction.

The IGP should work to create an environment which promotes mutual cooperation rather than resort to confrontation and therefore abusing freedom of expression and the media. It is the statutory obligation of the police to ensure that Ugandans and journalists enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms.

If the IGP, and or his officers don’t stop making derogatory statements against the media, we will not hesitate to drag him to court for actions.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right to all Ugandans as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, regional and international Instruments to which Uganda is a party of. The limitations are also provided for under Article 43(1) of the Constitution. The media is a public good which serves all kinds of people both in and outside of government.

Thank you.

ROBERT SSEMPALA.

NATIONAL COORDINATOR.