



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

27th November, 2017

HRNJ-Uganda Press Statement on Shut down and illegal arrest of Red Pepper journalists.

“Media rights body human rights network for journalists-Uganda announces countrywide demonstrations and media black-out over shutdown and illegal detention of red pepper publications directors and editors”

On Tuesday 21st November 2017, Police raided the Red Pepper publications, cordoned off the premises and took hostage all its staff within the premises, releasing them later in the night after searching them and confiscating their cell phones and other work tools. Five Directors and three Editors were arrested, their homes searched and later detained at the highly feared Nalufenya detention center, a place known for detaining hardcore criminals and notorious for gruesome torture.

The Directors in detention include, Arinaitwe Rugyendo, Patrick Mugumya, Johnson Musinguzi, Richard Tusiime and James Mujuni, and editors; Ben Byarabaha (Managing Editor), Richard Kintu (News Editor) and Francis Tumusiime (News Editor). Red Pepper premises have remained shut down since 21st Nov, 2017, hence foiling the publication of The Red Pepper Newspaper, Kamunye Newspaper, Entasi Weekly Newspaper and Red Pepper Online issue.

This raid and shutdown of the Red Pepper points to a deteriorating state of free expression and press freedom in Uganda

Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) condemns this arbitrary act of raiding, continued arrest of the journalists and shutdown of the production premises. The amount of force applied is disproportionate, harsh and unprecedented. This constitutes economic sabotage to the media house.

The ideal way of going about this matter, would have been to summon the Red Pepper management to the CIID’s Media Crimes Department at Kibuli or involving the Media Council for interrogations as part of the investigations, and in case they did not comply, an arrest warrant would then have been issued.

HRNJ-Uganda is reliably informed that prior to the media siege, a meeting was held between the line minister and the Red Pepper management and a consensus was reached including having the minister write a rebuttal to the published story. Unfortunately the Red Pepper was raided on the same day in the evening before the rebuttal was published.

We are very puzzled about the frivolous charges of treason preferred against the journalists for doing their work. The other charges preferred against the eight are; offensive communication and disturbing the peace of President Yoweri Museveni, security minister Henry Tumukunde and Gen. Salim Saleh (Caleb Akandanwaho).

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We have learnt that this Monday morning, the Red Pepper Directors and Editors were brought from Nalufenya, taken to St. Francis hospital for medical check-up and later taken to the Red Pepper premises. It is not clear how soon the investigations would end and brought to court.

Owing to the ongoing, HRNJ-Uganda demands the following;

1. Since the journalists have been detained beyond the mandatory 48 hours, their continued detention is illegal. They should be taken to court and charged by Tuesday 28th Nov, 2017 or else the journalists community in Uganda will hold a peaceful demonstrations across the country in demand of justice for the detained Directors and Editors of the Red Pepper
2. Since it is not clear when the investigations would end, the siege on the Red Pepper be lifted forthwith to let business resume, as the continued shutdown amounts to ECONOMIC SABOTAGE
3. The State should stopped criminalization of media work and subjecting editors and reporters to unwarranted interrogations over their lawful and legitimate work.
4. Continued detention of the Red Pepper Editors and Directors by the police will lead to a total media black-out on all police activities, but concentrate on only reporting about the abuses and violations committed by the force
5. We call on all journalists, editors, managers, owners and human rights defenders to join hands in demand for justices for the journalists who are under incarceration by the State

We implore all media houses and independent practitioners to observe professionalism at all times to avoid being caught on the wrong side of the law by the authorities.

Let's all stand in solidarity in defence of freedom of expression and the media in Uganda



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