



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

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For Immediate Release

Press statement on the continuous attack on the media by security agencies

Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda), wishes to express concern over the continued attack on media freedom and the rights of journalists in Uganda by state agencies. We notice with dismay several actions by security personnel lately have been infringing on freedom of expression and press freedom. We wish to note that, most of these actions limiting press freedom and rights of journalists have been on the rise since the end of 2017 and have persisted in 2018 with limited preventive response from government to put a halt at this degenerating situation. The attacks and threats range from assault, denial of access to news scenes, damage of gadgets, unlawful arrest and detention and abduction.

On 22nd February 2018, police officers based at the Uganda Police Headquarters in Naguru, blocked journalists from covering the trial by the Police Court of the embattled Assistant Superintendent of Police Muhammad Kirumira and the former District Police Commander of Buyende District in Eastern Uganda.

Before the denial of coverage of the court proceedings, police officers led by Assistant Inspector of Police Abinuku assaulted and manhandled Nsimbi Posiano a News reporter attached to Bukedde Newspaper under Vision Group.

Charles Etukuri, a New Vision journalist went missing on 12th February 2018 at about 2:00pm when he was 'abducted' by Internal Security Operatives (ISO) at the Vision Group offices. He was detained for a week in an unknown place beyond 48 hours. He was later released on 19th February 2018 after the High Court in Kampala had issued a writ of habeas corpus. Etukuri's arrest is suspected to be related to stories he published on Saturday 10th and 11th February 2018 about the demise of a Finnish National at the pearl of Africa Hotel in Kampala under mysterious circumstances. In the story, Etukuri highlighted about possible involvement of senior army officers the murder.

On Monday 19th February 2018, Richard Kasule a.k.a Kamagu, a prominent Top Radio journalist was arrested from the Top Radio offices immediately after hosting the morning show dubbed *'Simbula'*. Kamagu was released on 20th February 2018 with charges of offensive communication.

Early this year, on 15th January 2018, Twaha Mukiibi, an NBS journalist was beaten by police officers at Rose Gardens in Kyengera while interviewing a self-confessed gang of thieves. Mukiibi sustained body injuries and was admitted at Kampala hospital for four days.

On 12th February 2018, army officers attached to Kimaka army barracks beat up Ivan Lubega, a Jinja based journalist attached to Kiira Fm and Bukedde Tv. Lubega was covering a scuffle in Jinja that had ensued over land in Kimaka which is next to the Military barracks. He sustained severe injuries on his left hand and his camera was destroyed in the process.

It should be noted that, scores of journalists were attacked towards the end of 2017 particularly during the age limit removal debate labeled *'togikwatako'*. These include among others; Egena Denis (NBS TV), Otwwi Isaac (Daily Monitor), Robert Kalibong(Unity FM), all from Lira District. Others include Bulegeya Ronnie of Dream TV, Kigongo Ssebalamu-Bukedde TV, Kyambadde Lawrence of Salt Media.

The period did not also spare the eight Red Pepper Directors and Editors who were arrested and detained at the notorious Nalufenya police facility on 21st November 2017. This was after the paper had published a story titled *"Museveni planning to overthrow Kagame"* that was presumed to be prejudicial to national security. Five directors and three editors were arrested and detained at the notorious Nalufenya police station for a week. They are Tumusiime Richard, Arinaitwe Rugyendo, James Mujuni, Johnson Musinguzi and Richard Kintu, Byarabaha Ben, Tumusiime Francis, directors and editors respectively. On 27th December they were brought to Buganda Road Magistrates Court where they were charged with criminal libel and offensive communication among other charges. They were granted bail on 19th December 2017.

As a media rights body whose core mandate is to promote and defend the rights of journalists, media freedoms, freedom of expression, HRNJ-Uganda regrettably notes that the continued acts of meting violence against journalists, unlawful arrests and detention, curtail freedom of expression and media rights which are fundamental human rights guaranteed under Article 29 of the 1995 Constitution and recognized under other regional and International Human Rights Instruments that Uganda is party to.

In view of the above, HRNJ-Uganda recommends that;

1. The police should investigate as a matter of urgency the cases that are before them to ensure that justice prevails.
2. The judiciary should expeditiously handle matters involving journalists so as to ensure that justice is delivered timely.
3. The state should reign in on errant public officers that have turned it a habit to infringe media freedoms and bring them to book
4. The state at all times must respect, promote and uphold people's rights especially freedom of expression and press freedom
5. UPF and UPDF to work towards restoring confidence among journalists by ensuring their safety and security rather than traumatizing/ attacking them.
6. We urge the members of the media fraternity to be professional in their work, vigilant and work together in ensuring their safety and security.

For God and My Country



ROBERT SEMPALA
NATIONAL COORDINATOR