HRNJ-Uganda launched its ninth Press Freedom Index report 2017 titled “Critical Journalism Under Attack”.

On 27th April, 2018, the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda launched its Press Freedom Index report at Imperial Royale hotel, Kampala.

The report presents its findings on the situation of press freedoms in Uganda during the year 2017. The PFI provides a detailed account of violations committed against media and highlights aspects of the legal, policy and institutional regulatory frame works that threaten freedoms of expression and the media. It also looks at a range of human rights violations and abuses against journalists, media workers and media houses during 2017.

The event was attended by 50 delegates and among them was; Hon. Members of Parliament; Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Representatives from Civil Society Organizations, Academia and Media houses.

The launch was graced by HE. Mogens Pedersen, the Ambassador of Denmark to Uganda.

The chief guest explained to the delegates that; in 2016, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution calling upon member states to develop and implement strategies for combating impunity against journalists.

Compared to many countries in the world, Uganda has over the years enjoyed relatively good level of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Freedom House has in 2018, assessed the press in Uganda to have slightly improved from “Not Free” to “Partly Free” due to the resilience of the media sector and the willingness of journalists, bloggers, and citizens to voice their opinions, though the political environment remained tightly restricted.

The UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution calling upon member states to develop and implement strategies for combating impunity for attacks on journalists and to maintain, a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work without interference.
H.E. Mogens also analysed the HRNJ-Uganda Press Freedom Index Report for Uganda 2017. He said the report reveals 113 violations against journalists involving both state and non-state actors. The violations range from assault, denial of access to news scenes, malicious damage of journalists’ equipment, abduction, as well as unlawful arrests and detention.

Some media houses have suffered close downs and in some cases specific programs that are considered offensive by state agencies were banned. Increased control of the internet has been prominently used against freedom of expression with unjustified cuts and limitations to use of social media. This was evident in the 2016 presidential elections and in 2017 during the debate on the Constitutional Amendment Bill.

Meeting with Media Crimes unit

On the 29th March 2018, HRNJ-Uganda conducted a meeting at the Criminal Investigations Directorate in Kibuli Kampala Uganda.

The meeting was attended by a team of four members from HRNJ-Uganda: Mr. Julius Esegu (Board Chairperson); Mr. Robert Ssempala (Executive Director); Mrs. Nandudu Diana Flavia Okia (programme officer); Mr. Emmanuel Magambo (IT and Information officer).

The Media Crimes Unit team comprised of; Detective Asst. Commissioner of Police Mr. Oketcho Isaac, he is also the acting Commissioner Media Crimes Unit; Mr. Police Ayiko, Detective Assistant Inspector of Police; Mr. Were Iman both Investigators of Media Crimes and Mr. Vincent Ssekate, Public Relations Officer- Interpol Peace Support Operation, Professional Standards Unit and Criminal Investigations Directorate.

Issues discussed; the need to stop media houses from writing sensational headlines that bring anxiety among the people; media houses to stop exposing witnesses in high profile criminal cases; the need to sensitize journalists on ethics and professionalism; the need to conduct dialogues between the police and the journalists.
HRNJ_Uganda held a Meeting with Media Council.


The meeting was attended by a team of three members from HRNJ-Uganda Mr. Robert Ssempala (Executive Director); Mr. Moses Magoola, (programme manager); and Mr. Emmanuel Magambo (IT and Information officer); Ms. Pauline Okoth, Freedom House; Mr. Okello Peter and Mr. Pius Mwinganisa from the Media Council.

Among the issues discussed were; sensitizing HRNJ-Uganda members about the Media Council as a regulator; building synergies on capacity building for journalists and selecting human rights forums for resolving issues.

Meeting with Uganda Human Rights Commission

Human Rights network for journalists-Uganda held a meeting with the Chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commision (UHRC) Hon. Meddie Kaggwa. The meeting was held on 29th March 2018 at the Human Rights Commission in Kampala Uganda. It was attended by a team of four members from HRNJ-Uganda to wit: Mr. Julius Esengu(Board Chairperson); Mr. Robert Ssempala(Executive Director); Mrs. Nandudu Diana Flavia Okia (programme officer); and Mr. Emmanuel Magambo( IT officer). Issues highlighted were; unprofessionalism among journalists; the need for human rights defenders to be cognizant of the environment they are operating in; better usage of the human rights desk at the police; the need for HRNJ-Uganda to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Uganda Human Rights Commission and Regular engagements with the Uganda Human Rights Commission on issues pertaining to the media.
Meeting with Uganda Parliamentary Forum on the Media

On the 16th of March 2018, HRNJ-Uganda held a meeting with Hon. Amoru Paul, Chairperson of Uganda Parliamentary Forum on the Media (UPFM). The objective of the meeting was to create a platform for future discourse between HRNJ-Uganda and Uganda Parliamentary Forum on the Media with a view of influencing the legislation agenda to involve media issues.

Some of the issues discussed were; The need to address gaps within the Access to Information Act; the need to sensitise district information officers about the Access to Information Act; ethical and professional conduct of journalists; and individual accountability on journalists’ rights.

The meeting was attended by a team from HRNJ-Uganda; Uganda Parliamentary Press Association Mr. Okello Dickens and Ms. Pauline Okoth from Freedom House.

HRNJ-Uganda engaged the Minister of Internal Affairs

HRNJ-Uganda engaged the Minister of Internal Affairs Hon. Jeje Odong. The meeting took place on 27th March 2018 at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kampala. It aimed at creating a platform for future discourse between HRNJ-Uganda and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Among those who attended was; Mr. Robert Ssempala, (Executive Director); Mr. Moses Magoola, (programme manager); Mr. Emmanuel Magambo (IT officer); and Pauline Okoth, Media specialists, Freedom House. The Minister pointed out that journalists in Uganda portray a negative picture over Uganda. They report only negative stories about the government and in most times without enough research. He implored HRNJ-Uganda to sensitize media houses on professional ethics rather than profit making.
Uganda V Augustine Okello Criminal Session
Case No. 45/2012
On 15th January 2018, HRNJ-Uganda contracted Wameli & Co. Advocates to represent Okello Augustine in Criminal case No. 45 of 2012. Okello and seven others were accused of abuse of inferiors contrary to section 141 of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces Act. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) discontinued the proceedings against Okello by filing a *nolle prosequi* on the 19th of February 2018. This was after counsel Wameli Anthony alongside other defence lawyers prayed to court to have the matter dismissed for want of prosecution.

Augustine Okello, a radio presenter from Rhino FM in Lira District was kidnapped on the evening of 13th of July 2011 on allegations that he had committed treason. He was detained incommunicado for two weeks until HRNJ-Uganda filed an application of habeous corpus in the High Court of Lira. He was later produced at Buganda Road Magistrates Court on 1st August 2011 where he was charged with treason.

In October 2017, treason charges against Augustine were dropped and he was charged with Abuse of Inferiors Contrary to Section 141 of the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act (UPDF Act).

b) Twaha Mukiibi V Attorney General & 2ors
On 14th March 2018 HRNJ-Uganda contracted Namugali & Walyemera Advocates to file an application for the arrest of Twaha Mukiibi, an NBS journalist. The pleadings were filed on 29th March 2018 and hearing date is yet to be fixed.

Twaha Mukiibi was on 15th January 2018 assaulted by policemen in uniform and civilian attire at Rose Gardens in Kyengera, Wakiso district, during an exclusive interview with a notorious self-confessed criminal gang “kifeesi”.

“Policemen stormed the venue during an interview and started beating everyone at the scene.

They hit me with a baton on the legs and immediately put up my hands pleading that I am a journalist hoping that it would save me, but it made matters worse as others joined in the beating with batons, kicks and pepper spray”. Twaha told HRNJ-Uganda Executive Director Robert Ssempala who visited him at Kampala International hospital.
Fact Finding Mission to Arua

On 13th -15th March 2018, the HRNJ-Uganda Legal Clerk Mr. Mpaata Ivan conducted a fact finding mission in Arua District in a matter involving one correspondent Onguzu Ronald. Mr. Mpaata established that on 30th October 2017 Oguzu Ronald was manhandled, arrested and beaten by residents of Obbi Village, Nyio Parish, Vurra Sub County in Arua District. This was while he was covering a reconciliatory meeting that had been called to help resolve land wrangles between two rivalling families- John Ondia Yosiya and Nabutu Yosiya’s family. Onguzu lost two upper and two lower front teeth.

He reported a case of assault occasioning actual bodily harm at Vurra Police Post under SD 08/30/10/2017 and the file was later transferred to Arua Central Police Station. He interviewed three witnesses; John Ondia Yosiya, Avuru Tabita and Edematara Micheal who confirmed that Oguzu had been assaulted.

However, upon following up the matter at the said police station, Mr. Mpaata discovered that Onguzu’s case file had been wrongly merged with that of other complainants whose property was destroyed and houses set on fire.

He advised the Investigating Officer Mr. Okello Moses attached to Arua Central Police to separate the files and record fresh statements from the eye witnesses.
HRNJ-Staff attend a Project Planning and Management Training Session.
On 28th and 29th March 2018, HRNJ-Uganda conducted a two day staff/ board training on Project Planning and Management at Green Hills Hotel in Kampala. The meeting was attended by eight (8) Board members (2 females, 6 males) and nine staff members (4 females, 5 males).

The FH’s OCDC also participated in the training to ensure quality and realization of intended training objectives. The training aimed at developing and enhancing the board/ staff skills on effective and efficient running and management of projects in the organization.

The training was facilitated by Mr. Denis Kaggwa Zziwa and Robert Wanyama of Freedom House. Some of the topics covered included; Project Management, Project Cycle and developing a logical framework.

Security Training in Gulu.
To address the current escalation of attacks against journalists in Uganda that threatens enjoyment of press freedom, HRNJ-Uganda has been undertaking a series of security assessment and management interventions to contend with the changing social-political context.

In that regard, two safety and security trainings were conducted in 2017 in Masaka and Mbale. On the 21st and 22nd June 2018, another training on safety and security was conducted in Gulu district at Global Friendship hotel.

The training aimed at discussing personal safety and security for journalists with the view of creating a safe operating environment for the media in Uganda.

Major issues highlighted were; Managing safety and security; Information safety; definition of security, safety and threats; situation analysis; field analysis; information mapping and digital security.
Validation of the draft Advocacy Strategy

On 19th January 2018, HRNJ-Uganda conducted a validation meeting for its advocacy strategy.

The Advocacy Strategy seeks to advance and advocate for a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers in Uganda. The strategy is an overarching framework that has been constructed to facilitate a structured procedure and multiple engagements to address the matter of journalist’s safety and security.

The meeting was attended by representatives from different civil society organisations; Defenders Protection Initiative (DPI), Human Rights Centre Uganda, and Foundation for Human Rights Initiative, Legal Aid Service Providers Network, ACTV, National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders, and HURINET among others.

Members said that; Media entrepreneurs are the major threats to media rights in Uganda. That they tend to care more for their businesses than the editorial independence of the media organizations. A media convention where all stakeholders identify problems and come up with strategies was suggested. It was also agreed that the judiciary should be brought on board due to its crucial role in ensuring the protection of media rights and freedoms and delivering justice in the country. Members said that there is need to talk to the heads of legal departments of the different stakeholders like Uganda Communication Commission, DPP and Police because they have a lot of influence. It was finally agreed that the background of the advocacy strategy should address the political environment and bring out the peculiar issues affecting the media.


The event was attended by delegates from around the world. Among the delegates were representatives from; Civil Society Organizations; development partners, media practitioners and the journalists.

It was represented by Mr. Moses Magoola, Programs Manager and Mr. Robert Ssempala, Executive Director.

The event was organized by UNESCO and HRNJ-Uganda participated as an African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) member.

Mr. Moses Magoola was a panelists who presented on the following issues: Key threats to Journalists in Africa today; innovative, effective and impactful ways of promoting journalists safety in Africa; gender aspects of safety of journalists; and recommendations to improve the safety of journalists in Africa.

Consequently HRNJ-Uganda shared best practices with likeminded organizations and will be able to replicate other international standards and approaches that were acquired during the event.
HRNJ-Uganda held its 4th Annual General Meeting on 2nd December 2017, at Pope hotel, Kampala. The colorful event was attended by 194 members of HRNJ-Uganda, friends and well wishers.

The meeting sought to audit the previous year’s progress with a view of assessing achievements, challenges and opportunities of 2017.

The meeting also provided a forum for members to participate in making decisions about the future of the organization.

During the Annual General Meeting, a new board was ushered in.

Over the years, HRNJ-Uganda has grown in its programming and its institutional development that requires strengthening of systems.

The organization is composed of the secretariat which is the implementing body and the Executive Board whose core mandate is to provide an oversight role on the secretariat and formulate policies for the organization.

In order to strengthen her internal systems, HRNJ-Uganda organized a three days retreat from 26th-28th February 2018 at Mirembe Resort Beach, Kalangala. The retreat was attended by 20 people including; HRNJ-Uganda staff, board members and one representative from Freedom House.

The retreat aimed at creating avenues for strategical thinking, planning and pondering on the future of the organization. Another aim of the retreat was to strengthen team work both at the secretariat and at the board level by identifying unique contributions of each staff member.

A number of activities were carried out in the retreat; an induction on the strategic plan 2017-2022; a review of the draft work plan 2018; plotting of the activity chart; presentation of the project reports 2017 and Staff Appraisals.