



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

22ND AUGUST, 2018

PRESS STATEMENT

Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda), as an organization at the forefront of defending and promoting freedom of expression, information and the media condemns in the strongest terms possible, the current wave of attacks on journalists in the line of duty in Uganda as witnessed during the Arua Municipality by-elections and the Free-Bobi-Wine campaigns in Kampala.

We express our sincere gratitude to all persons, civil society organisations, regional and international agencies who have lent us their voices and stood firm with us in this trying time when the media is under siege.

We welcome as a good gesture, the press statement from the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF)' Chief of Defence Forces and signed by the force' Spokesperson, Brigadier Karemire Richard, dated the 21st day of August, 2018, whereupon he acknowledged the unprofessional conduct of soldiers who "molested" journalists on 20th day of August, 2018, he further expressed displeasure at the same and expressed apologies and sympathies to the brutalized journalists.

In as much as we acknowledge the effort taken by the UPDF in condemning such vicious and barbaric brutalities against journalists in their lines of duty by soldiers, we wish to state that we are not excited about the statement because it is devoid of commitments that a *disciplined and professional force* like the UPDF should undertake to address such grave injustices. We were deflated when the UPDF Spokesperson described the vicious brutalities on the journalists as a mere molestation. We find the statement of molestation not speaking to the realities of the brutalities meted out to the journalists and other civilians on that fateful day and also understates the blatant human rights violations that were committed by these errant soldiers. What pains the most is fact that the statement is silent on what actions the UPDF seeks to undertake to ensure that the perpetrators of these aggressions on journalists are individually brought to book.

The principle that justice must not only be done but also be seen to be done dictates our demands that the UPDF must arrest and release the identities of the soldiers who perpetuated these cruel acts, and make a firm commitment that actions are being taken to bring these errant soldiers before the law as well as undertake that such actions do not ever reoccur.

These blatant violations of constitutionally guaranteed liberties go against the fundamentals for which the National Resistance Army (NRA), currently the UPDF, fought for in the 1986 liberation war. The malfeasance that was exhibited by these security agencies is symptomatic of the decaying rule of law in the Country and these injustices must not go unpunished or else we shall continue breeding a culture of impunity, especially at the hands of the security agents.

To this end, we would like to ask the following from the UPDF and sister security agencies;

- Arrest the errant soldiers who committed these brutalities.
- Release the identities and/or particulars of the soldiers who perpetuated these cruel acts on the journalists.
- Make a firm commitment that these soldiers will be brought before the law and the journalists are able to witness the said trial process.
- Make a firm commitment that such acts of brutality and harassment of journalists shall not reoccur at the hands of the security forces.
- A similar statement from the police and Special Forces Command (SFC) should be released to the media about the steps to be taken against their implicated officers.

In the event that the above-mentioned demands are not met within 48 hours, HRNJ-Uganda together with the entire media fraternity and other like-minded human rights organisations will have no options but to take the following steps by way of protest;

- Boycott media coverage of events organized by the UPDF, Ministry of Defence and other sister security agencies.
- Organise countrywide peaceful protests calling for justice and an end to brutality by security agencies.
- As well as several other peaceful activities that will be deemed appropriate.

We call upon the owners and managers of the different media houses to stand up and speak out against this horrific clampdown on media freedom. We urge journalists to prioritise their safety and safeguard their lives and property against these looming threats. Above all, we call for solidarity within the media fraternity.

We all should work for a peaceful and conducive working environment for the media with all the security forces in the country.

For God and My Country



**ROBERT SEMPALA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**