



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

28th/August/2018

Press Release

Threatening calls, Blackmail of journalists and Progress of the Army towards apprehending the soldiers who “molested” journalists

Threatening calls:

Human Rights Network for journalists-Uganda has received complaints from some journalists who covered the Arua by-elections alleging threats to their lives, accusing them of promoting the opposition. This is a very unfortunate development which is certainly intended to create fear within the media to shy away from giving the opposition and dissenting voices a fair and objective coverage.

We urge the police to investigate these claims and ensure the safety of journalists covering politically related activities.

Targeted journalists' list:

There is a communication circulating on social media titled “**Opposition opts to use media to overthrow the Government.**” There are 19 journalists who have been implicated in the scheme. Their names, phone contacts as well as media houses have been listed. It's alleged this information is from impeccable sources.

Looking at the list, it is evident that these are names of journalists who have covered a number of political events in the country. We believe that this scheme is intended to blackmail the media and project it as partisan and unprofessional. It also has the potential to endanger the lives of the journalists on this list by political functionaries.

Giving coverage to political activities is a legitimate function of the media and should therefore not be criminalized or lead to persecution of the said journalists or their media houses. We believe whoever is aggrieved by the media giving coverage to the opposition should lodge a complaint with the relevant authorities than resorting to such cowardly acts of blackmail and intimidation.



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Army attack on journalists:

Following the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) press release, HRNJ-Uganda, on the 22nd day of August, 2018, convened a press conference, demanding for more action than just apologies from the army leadership. It also consequently wrote a letter to the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Gen. David Muhoozi and copied the same to the Forces' Spokesperson and the Uganda Human Rights Commission on the 23rd August 2018, wherein, it expressed dissatisfaction with the UPDF press statement. Some of the demands made to the UPDF include among others; arrest the errant soldiers who committed the brutalities, release the identities and/or particulars of the soldiers who perpetuated the cruel acts on the journalists and also make a firm commitment that these soldiers will be brought before the law and the journalists are able to witness the trial process.

Failure to meet these demands, the media fraternity would organize a nationwide peaceful protest

Consequently, on the 27th day of August, 2018, a team from Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) led by the Executive Director, Mr. Robert Ssempala met with the UPDF spokesperson Brigadier Richard Karemire at the UPDF/Ministry of Defence headquarters at Mbuya in Kampala.

The meeting was intended to follow-up with the Army leadership on how far they had gone with apprehending the soldiers who violently beat up the journalists.

HRNJ-Uganda pressed the UPDF for assurances that action was being taken to ensure that the perpetrators of the violence on the journalists are brought to book and to ensure that justice is served.

Brigadier Karemire stressed UPDF's commitment on taking firm action against the errant soldiers and informed the HRNJ-Uganda team that the culprits had been apprehended. To emphasize UPDF's commitment at ensuring that justice will be dispensed, he pointed to the fact the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), Gen. David Muhoozi would personally issue progress updates on the matter, to the media fraternity and the general public in due course.



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About the treatment of the victim journalists, it was said that UPDF is willing to foot the medical expenses of all the journalists assaulted by the UPDF soldiers.

Therefore, owing to the assurances and commitments made by the UPDF, HRNJ-Uganda thought it prudent to give the UPDF a benefit of doubt and time to allow it to conduct its internal processes in a bid to bring the perpetrators before the law.

HRNJ-Uganda therefore informs the media fraternity and the general public that following these developments, it has decided to suspend its intended campaign to boycott the coverage of UPDF activities together with its sister security agencies and all the nationwide peaceful protests among other planned activities.

HRNJ-Uganda will continue to actively follow up and engage the UPDF leadership in regards to this matter and in the event it finds that no action or insufficient action has been taken, HRNJ-Uganda together with the wider media fraternity, will at an appropriate time determine the next course of action.

HRNJ-Uganda shall continue to advocate for justice for the brutalized journalists and work for a peaceful and conducive working environment for the media in Uganda.