



# HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

**31<sup>st</sup> OCTOBER 2019**

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

### **Journalists slap media black-out on police due to heightened brutality**

Following persistent and deliberate attacks on journalists while on duty by armed forces, mainly the Uganda Police Force, at Makerere University, journalists have declared a media black-out on the police until the safety and security of journalists covering news in spaces manned by the police is guaranteed.

Since October 22, 2019, when Makerere University students started protesting the 15% fees increment, attacks on the Journalists covering the impasse at Makerere University have escalated to unacceptable levels. Human Rights Network for journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) has documented over 20 journalists who have fallen victims. Some have been brutally assaulted and sustained injuries, teargassed, arrested and released without charges, while others blocked from accessing the news. Some have had their gadgets confiscated or forced to delete their recordings. The police also disrupted a press conference convened by the Guild Council leaders.

For the last 10 years, HRNJ-Uganda has produced media rights reports (Press Freedom Index) indicating the armed forces, mainly the police are the leading violators of Press Freedom in Uganda. Most of them have not been punished because most cases have not been investigated to their logical conclusion.

It seems very deliberate and ill-intentioned on the part of the police and their sister forces to target journalists on sight. The police have exhibited unexplainable wrath towards Journalists in the line of duty over time. This has made it extremely difficult or even impossible for the media to do its work of gathering and disseminating news as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and other regional and international instruments to which Uganda is a party.

So at this point in time, we encourage all journalists to shun coverage of any news involving the police because this continues to risk their lives, given that a number of our colleagues have been met with excessive brutality and hurt. Journalists should keep away from any coverage of the police as a way to remain safe. This measure however should not mean that excesses committed by the police are not exposed by the media We wonder why the police have turned journalists into their direct enemies and so drawn such unwarranted battle lines.



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We call upon all Journalists and media houses to join in this campaign in a bid to work towards a conducive operating environment. We believe that something fundamentally different has to be done. We, therefore, urge the police leadership to take action against their men and women implicated in attacks on Journalists on duty.

The police should also desist from taking partisan sides at the expense of press freedom and the public's right to information.

We call upon all journalists to support this noble cause of ending impunity for crimes against journalists. The editors, managers and owners have a very critical role to play in amplifying the plight of our journalists who go to the field, especially at this critical time when they have been turned into targets by armed forces.

Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-UGANDA) supports all efforts aimed at resolving this current state of insecurity characterizing the work of Journalists at the hands of security forces. We are grateful to all efforts already being made by journalists, media owners, Human Rights activists, and diplomatic missions to ensure the safety of journalists and calling for justice for all crimes committed by both State and non-state actors.

A media black-out takes immediate effect to such a time when the police leadership has demonstrated a commitment to desist from attacking journalists on the line of duty. We will also devise other ways of showing our displeasure over this state of affairs.

We urge journalists to be very professional and responsible in the course of their work.

Together in solidarity for press freedom

**ROBERT SEMPALA**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**