



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

Press statement on the continuous attack on journalists covering political campaigns

28th December 2020; Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) is very concerned over the increased attacks on journalists covering campaign trails of candidates contesting for different positions in the country. What continues to baffle us is the silence by the police and army leadership in these cases. No action has been taken against the errant officers and this entrenched wide scale impunity.

So far, we have noticed that there have been several violations and unnecessary interference in the work of journalists and media houses, destruction of journalistic tools, physical assault and intimidation inter alia. It should be noted that practicing a profession is a constitutionally guaranteed right provided for under Article 40(2) of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. HRNJ-Uganda has so far recorded over sixteen cases of physical attacks against journalists covering opposition politicians.

As an organisation, we are also concerned by the acts of security agencies switching off radio stations hosting opposition candidates and also blocking them from appearing on talkshows.

Below are some of the cases of attacks on journalists as recorded by HRNJ-Uganda between August 2020 and 28th December 2020 by the Uganda Police Force, Uganda Peoples Defense Forces, contestants' supporters and members of the community;

On 27th December 2020, three journalists covering the campaign trail of Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert (Bobi Wine) were brutally attacked by police in Masaka district. These include Daniel Lutaaya (NBS TV), Ali Mivule (NTV) and Ashiraf Kasirye (Ghetto TV) who is currently in critical condition.

On 11th December 2020 in Lira district, six journalists covering a standoff between Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert and police were assaulted. These include David Tamale (Bukedde TV), Ssesanga Batte (BBS TV), John Cliff Wamala (NTV), Moses Waiswa (Busoga One), Ronald Mugenyi (Ghetto Media) and Jonah Atusingwize (Pearl FM).



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Also, David Lubowa, a Daily Monitor journalist was on 6th December 2020, was injured when a tear gas canister was hurled at him by police while covering the campaign trail of Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert in Jinja district.

While on 18th November 2020, Ashraf Kasirye, Ghetto TV journalist was pepper sprayed by police while taking pictures of officers arresting the National Unity Platform (NUP) presidential Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert alias Bobi Wine in Luuka district where he was slated to hold a campaign rally.

On the same day, Balikowa Samuel, a journalist attached to City FM in Jinja district was arrested while covering the arrest of Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert and held in a police van for close to thirty (30) minutes and released unconditionally. While in the van, he was allegedly pepper sprayed by his captors.

On Sunday 15th November 2020, Mukama Moses, a Baba FM correspondent in Buyende district was assaulted by supporters of Engineer Moses Magogo, who is aspiring for Member of Parliament -Budiope East Constituency. Mukama was covering Magogo's campaign rally convened at Gumpi Primary School, Gumpi Sub County in Buyende district, Eastern Uganda. Mukama lost his phone, camera and other items. He sustained injuries on the head, chest and back.

Also on 12th November 2020, in Lira district Northern Uganda, a fully branded car that was carrying the NBS TV crew (Daniel Lutaaya and Kitimbo Thomas) covering the campaign trail of presidential aspirant Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert was vandalized by 'goons'. They were hit with stones hence damaging the car glasses. One of their bags containing a laptop, phones and a charger was taken. Kitimbo Thomas sustained injuries on the head and the left hand.

And Miracle Ibrahim, a Top TV & Top Radio correspondent in Lwengo district who was allegedly assaulted by supporters of Hajji Abdul Kiyimba on 27th August 2020. Hajji Abdul Kiyimba is contesting for Member of Parliament for Bukoto South. His camera was destroyed in the process.



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From the above overview, it is evident that the media is under attack and the situation is likely to remain volatile for the foreseeable future if the police and army leadership fail to take any action. It also seems apparent that there is deliberate ploy by the security agencies to target the journalists covering opposition politicians even when they are donned on press jackets. The malfeasance by the state security agencies in oppressing the media is symptomatic of the wider problem of the decaying rule of law in the country.

Way forward:

1. The police should arrest, investigate and take to court perpetrators of violence and threats against journalists.
2. The police and army should desist from targeting journalists and media houses giving coverage to the opposition and other dissenting views.
3. The media should remain fair, balanced and objective to all the candidates during the campaigns. The media should also be united to defend their rights and freedoms during such times.
4. Given the crucial role played by the media in entrenching democracy, all the various stakeholders should work hand in hand to create a conducive operating environment.
5. Political candidates with their supporters should desist from targeting journalists and media houses during the campaign period.
6. HRNJ-Uganda reiterates its commitment to document and pursue justice in courts of law for and on behalf of the victim journalists

We applaud all efforts by media owners, managers, editors, wider civil society, journalists, media development organisations and the diplomatic community for continuing with a demand for the protection and respect of journalists rights and freedom of expression in Uganda