



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS - UGANDA

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

Press statement on the continuous attacks on journalists

For immediate release, 27th July 2023

Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) has been monitoring and observing the violent attacks against journalists since the beginning of the year 2023 to date. We have documented several attacks on journalists, most of them are in form of physical assault, unlawful arrest and detention, malicious damage to property and threatening violence among others. So we are gravely concerned over the continuous attacks and threats against journalists while in the line of duty by both the State and non-state actors.

Between 1st January 2023 and 26th July 2023, HRNJ-Uganda has so far registered 16 cases of assault, 9 confiscated gadgets, 2 threatening violence, 10 arrests, and 6 malicious damage to property against journalists' occasioned by the police, army and community members. All these forty three (43) cases are directly linked to media work.

Assault victims: 16 cases

Kakooza George William, Sula Kagugube and Nora Odoi of CBS FM and UBC TV respectively were on 26th January 2023 assaulted by the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority (UCAA) officials for taking pictures of their car. The officials accused the journalists of exposing corruption at Entebbe International Airport that put their jobs at risk.

Moris Okwi, a Uganda Radio Network (URN) correspondent in Soroti City was on 24th February 2023 assaulted by supporters of Philip Oucor, the National Resistance Movement flag bearer during the Serere County by-elections. Okwi sustained severe bodily injuries.

David Awori, a Daily Monitor correspondent in Busia district was on 12th April 2023 assaulted by the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces officers. He was covering a confrontation between the security officers and suspected smugglers whose goods were impounded at Busia Taxi Park. His camera, phone and bag were confiscated by the army officers.

Kitimbo Thomas and Isano Francis were on 12th April intentionally pepper-sprayed by a one Corporal Yeeko Ogwal while covering a demonstration by Intern doctors at Mulago hospital

On 29th May 2023, Okudi Martin, the NBS TV Bureau Chief for Madi sub-region was attacked and assaulted by unknown people who made away with his gadgets. The attack is reportedly linked to a series of stories that Okudi was publishing about illegal logging and charcoal burning around Apaa area in Adjumani district. The stories did not go well with some community members since there is an Executive directive by President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni banning such activities.

Eddy Enuru, the NBS TV Bureau Chief in Teso Sub-region was assaulted on 14th June 2023 at Township primary school polling station by an unknown person. Enuru was covering the Bukedea LCV by-elections. He sustained injuries around the left buccal cavity and the left lateral neck. His gadget which he using to record was damaged.

On 27th June 2023, Oceng Simon Peter, a presenter on Shine FM in Oyam district was assaulted by Stalon Olong, an NRM party supporter as well as the Chairperson Oyam Town Council business community. Oceng sustained injuries on the left eye and ear. Apparently, Oceng's attack is based on a UPC political song that he played on Shine FM shortly before the NRM talk show that was supposed to be hosted on the said radio station.

On 3rd July 2023, Gerald Niyirinda, a journalist attached to Radio Muhabura in Kisoro district was assaulted by the Manager of Gateway Bus Company only identified as Yusuf. Gerald was covering a demonstration by the passengers of the said bus company for failure to deliver them to their final destination. He sustained bodily injuries and his recorder was damaged.

On 20th July 2023, Ainembabazi Nowamani of Urban TV, Amayiko Kigongo of Radio Simba, Joseph Balikuddembe of CBS FM and Kataloba William of Namirembe FM were assaulted by suspected goons at the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) headquarters in Najjanankumbi when they had gone to cover a press conference convened by the party Chairman, Ambassador Wasswa Birigwa.

On 20th July 2023, Ogulei John, a journalist attached to TBS FM in Soroti City was assaulted by the Regional Police Commander of East Kyoga Region Kityo Moses Mwanga. Ogulei had gone to Hursey Resort to cover a meeting between the Minister of Local Government Raphael Magyezi and Soroti Main Market Vendors.

Malicious damage: 6 cases

Okot Ronny Job, the NBS TV correspondent in Greater Northern Uganda was on 18th February 2023 arrested and detained at Zoka police barracks when he went to Adjumani district to do a follow up story about the looming eviction of the local people from Apaa land by the government. He was allegedly arrested for interviewing the local people without permission from police. During his arrest, his camera and tripod stand were damaged.

On 24th February 2023, Moris Okwi a URNJ journalist in Soroti City had his phone damaged by the supporters of Philip Oucor an NRM contender for the Serere county by-elections.

On 14th June 2023 Eddy Enuru, the NBS TV Bureau Chief in Teso Sub-region was assaulted at Township primary school polling station by an unknown person while covering the Bukedea LCV by-elections. He sustained injuries and his phone was damaged.

On 3rd July 2023, Gerald Niyirinda of Radio Muhabura was attacked by a one Yusuf the Manager of Gateway Bus Company while covering a demonstration by the passengers of the bus company. His recorder was damaged during the attack.

On 20th July 2023, the Regional Police Commander of East Kyoga Region, Kityo Moses Mwanga, damaged the phone and tripod stand belonging to Ogulei John, a journalist attached to TBS FM in Soroti city, at Hursey Resort. Ogulei had gone to cover a meeting between the Minister for Local Government Hon. Raphael Magyezi and Soroti main market vendors.

And lastly, on 20th July 2023, Joseph Balikuddembe, a journalist attached to CBS FM in Kampala had his recorder damaged by suspected goons at the FDC Headquarters in Najjanankumbi.

Arrest and detention: 10 cases

On 3rd January 2023, journalists Iceta Scovin (NMG), Mustafa Safi (Voice of Madi FM), Ronald Debo (TBS FM) and Stephen Unzimai of Radio Pacis were arrested when they went to Obongi Central Police Station to follow up the arrest of former MP Hon. Fungaroo Kaps Hassan who was picked up by the security forces as he had gone for a funeral in the area. The journalists were confined in a small room at Obongi CPS that was guarded by police and army.

On 26th January 2023 Kakooza George William, Sula Kagugube and Nora Odoi of CBS FM and UBC TV respectively were arrested by the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority (UCAA) officials and detained at Abayita police post for taking pictures of their car. The officials accused the journalists of exposing corruption at Entebbe International Airport that put their jobs at risk.

Okot Ronny Job, the NBS TV correspondent in Greater Northern Uganda was on 18th February 2023 arrested and detained at Zoka police station when he went to Adjumani district to do a follow up story about the looming eviction of the local people from Apaa land by the government. He was allegedly arrested for interviewing the local people without permission from police.

Andrew Arinaitwe, a journalist attached to the New Vision and the Continent (an international media agency) was on 4th March 2023 arrested at King's College Budo by the military. Andrew was investigating an alleged sex abuse story at the school. He was detained at Budo police post for a night before being released on bond. On 9th March 2023, he was arraigned before Nsangi Grade One Magistrate on charges of 'criminal trespass with intention to theft'.

Opio John Paul, a journalist at Arua One FM was on 19th June 2023 arrested by police while covering a demonstration by Muni University students. The students were demonstrating against the delayed payment of their allowances. He was detained at Arua Central Police Station.

Threats and intimidation: 2 cases

Amacha Goli, a Daily Express journalist based in Adjumani district was on 18th April 2023 allegedly threatened by Major Kibuuka Trevor the Second in Command of UPDF 71st Battalion and Sector Commander Apaa and the relatives of the Paramount Chief of Madi, Drani Stephen. The threats were as a result of a story he reported in the Daily Express (online publication) on 15th April 2023, to the effect that the duo tortured the local people of Ngoro West village in Adjumani district and evicted them from their land on ground that it had been sold to an Indian investor.

Aluma Clement, a journalist attached to the Daily Monitor in Arua City was threatened on 5th June 2023 after publishing a story about the death of Lt. Col Edward Nyororo who was killed from Somalia. He was threatened by the relatives of the deceased.

Confiscated gadgets: 9 cases

On 29th May 2023, Okudi Martin, an NBS TV Bureau Chief for Madi sub-region was attacked and assaulted by unknown people who made away with his gadgets. The attack is reportedly linked to a series of stories that Okudi was publishing about illegal logging and charcoal burning around Apaa area in Adjumani district. The attackers ordered Martin to surrender his gadgets and stop exposing reputable people in society.

Emuron George of Daily Monitor and Ojojo John Bosco of Continental FM, in Bukedea district were attacked on 14th June 2023 when they were returning from covering the Bukedea LCV by-elections at Tamula polling station, they were intercepted by two unknown men who were on a motorcycle wearing masks. They ordered the journalists to surrender their bag which had a Dell Laptop, two smart phones and two recorders or else, they would be killed.

On 19th June 2023, Opio John Paul an Arua One FM journalist in Arua City had his recorder taken during his arrest by police. Opio was covering students of Muni University who were demonstrating against the delayed payment of their allowances.

On 20th July 2023, journalists Waiswa Moses, Balikuddembe Joseph, Katabalwa Charles Kamywa, Ainembabazi Nowamani had their phones confiscated at the Forum for Democratic Change offices in Najjanankumbi by suspected goons while they had gone to cover a presser organized by the party chairman, Ambassador Wasswa Birigwa.

As a media rights advocacy organization, HRNJ-Uganda would like to emphasize the very important role the media plays in enlightening the populace, but most emphatically holding leaders accountable through its critical watchdog role. Despite this plausible role, many Ugandan journalists have continued to face threats and physical attacks while executing their work as indicated above. The journalists most targeted are those who cover stories related to human rights violations, corruption, demonstrations, crimes and political related cases. Globally, Uganda is ranked at number 132 out of 180 countries according to the Press Index 2022 report by *Reporters without Borders*. This represents a drop by seven places according to the 2021 rankings. This calls for improvement in the context as far as press freedom is concerned.

In view of the above, we recommend that;

1. The police should arrest, investigate and take to court perpetrators of violence and threats against journalists and media practitioners.
2. Journalists and media practitioners should be vigilant and work together in ensuring their safety and security.
3. Given the crucial role played by the media in entrenching democracy, all the various stakeholders including media house owners, editors, reporters, civil society, Parliament, the Judiciary and Executive, donors and the international community should work hand in hand to create and ensure a conducive operating media environment.

Conclusively, we want to categorically applaud the National Association of Broadcasters, the Editors Guild of Uganda and other stakeholders who have vehemently opposed the Presidential Directive to channel all government advertising through the National Broadcasters UBC and the Vision Group. This move is counterproductive to the progressive liberalization of the media in Uganda in the 1990s and the nature of our liberalized economy. We fear if sustained, this move will economically cripple the private independent, free and critical media which will result into massive labour cuts in the industry. It would also compromise the healthy competition within the industry. So we call on President Museveni to rescind this directive and allow free and fair competition within the media industry. If this directive is not set reconsidered, HRNJ-Uganda will join all progressive forces in challenging this unfair directive

Furthermore, we also challenge an order by the Anti-corruption Court to block a section of the media from covering the trial of the suspects in the disappearance of the iron sheets meant for the people of Karamoja. In 2014, the High Court in Kampala presided over by Justice Lydia Mugambe overturned a similar order by the then Buganda Road Chief Magistrate Lydia Bucyana blocking journalists from covering the trial of the Deputy Assistant Inspector of Police Ronald Poteri. Poteri was accused of wrongful communication and leaking of information contrary to the official Secrets Act. In the same vain, this directive is illegal since the journalists who are the direct victims of the directive were not heard. So we call on the Anti-Corruption court to reconsider this decision to allow journalists to cover the trial process or else, we are very ready to challenge the order.

TOGETHER FOR MEDIA FREEDOM



ROBERT SEMPALA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR