



THE HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE UGANDA (HRCU)

MONTHLY UPDATE ON THE CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT OF HRDS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN UGANDA DURING THE PREVALENCE OF COVID-19

Issue No. 2: May 2020

Introduction

During the month of May, HRDs continued to work remotely from home due to the lockdown as declared by the President of Uganda on the night of 30th March 2020 to curb the spread of the Corona virus.

Please read:

[https://www.kiu.ac.ug/news-page.php?
i=president-museveni-declares-lockdown-for-14-
days](https://www.kiu.ac.ug/news-page.php?i=president-museveni-declares-lockdown-for-14-days)

As at 31st May, samples tested confirmed 40 new cases with 23 among those from points of entry and 17 cases from contacts and alerts. This brought the total number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Uganda to 457.

Source: Ministry of Health, Uganda
[https://twitter.com/MinofHealthUG/status/12673
89590316425217](https://twitter.com/MinofHealthUG/status/1267389590316425217)

It is worth noting that this rise in numbers is observed despite the recent measures and steps declared by the President in relation to easing the lockdown in Uganda during his 14th addresses to the nation in which he

mentioned that shops selling general merchandize would open provided they were not in the shopping malls, the shopping arcades and food markets; the heroic market women that had slept in the work places for all the days of the lockdown would be allowed to go back to their homes and commute to work daily if they wanted to; he allowed the regulated opening of the public transport means of mini-buses, buses, taxis, provided they carry only one half of their normal capacity to enable people to travel, again without the usual over-crowding which was very dangerous during such times as these.

Read more details at:

[https://www.mediacentre.go.ug/media/
president-museveni-14th-address-nation](https://www.mediacentre.go.ug/media/president-museveni-14th-address-nation)

The easing of the lockdown gives a ray of hope for the country as we see people starting to return to work places and resuming normal life. The Human Rights Centre Uganda recommends that enforcement of restrictions continues to be done since many people shall relax if not checked and that would cause a great wave of the spread of the virus.

Global statistics on Covid-19

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) situation report, as at 31st May, 2020, global figures stood at 5,934,936 cases with 367,166 deaths. Of these, had 100,610 cases and 2,554 deaths while Europe had 2,142,547 cases and 180,085 deaths.

See details at:

[https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/
novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports)

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND OTHER ISSUES AFFECTING HUMAN RIGHTS AMIDST THESE PRECARIOUS TIMES

1. Arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detention

Some cases of arbitrary arrests were reported. For instance on 12th May 2020, vulnerable mothers in Lira district were arrested and detained by security forces for selling fruits and other food items.

A group of volunteers, including lawyers in Lango sub region condemned the actions of the security agents and collected money to bail out the 12 women who were part of some other 49 people arrested on 9th April 2020 for breaching the nationwide guidelines on curfew.



Picture 1: A woman pleads with police officers while being arrested in Lira town. *Picture courtesy of The New Vision*

Read the full story at:

https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1518701/lawyers-offer-free-services-jailed-mothers-lira and

<https://www.independent.co.ug/volunteers-fundraise-to-bail-out-residents-arrested-for-disobeying-covid-19-directives/>

2. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Reports across many districts in Uganda indicated that physical/domestic

violence cases were a common challenge and yet many Gender Based Violence (GBV) service providers could not be physically reachable because of restrictions caused by Covid-19.

The increased cases of GBV during this pandemic have been majorly attributed to the lockdown which has kept many women locked up with their abusers; closure of schools which has exposed young girls to unsafe conditions including sexual violence and harassment by male opportunists; tensions arising from men's inability to provide necessities for their families due to financial constraints.



Police spokesperson, Fred Enanga addressing the media on 11th May, 2020 in relation to murders arising out of domestic and gender based violence

Read more details at:

<https://www.dgf.ug/sites/default/files/resrcr/CEWIGO%20COVID->

<https://www.secondopinion.co.ug/mbarara-man-breaks-into-80-year-olds-house-rapes-her/>

3. Limitations on the right to health

The health care sector continued to grapple with cases of loss of lives amidst the lockdown due to the delays in responding to emergency cases. Among the victims include pregnant mothers who are still most affected especially those in rural areas. In this week's report, a 35-year-old pregnant woman died in Pallisa district after allegedly

failing to get transport to reach Pallisa main hospital.

Read more at:

<https://observer.ug/news/headlines/64775-35-year-old-pregnant-woman-dies-in-pallisa-after-failing-to-get-ambulance->

4. Use of excessive force by security agents (LDUs)

The use of excessive force by security agents to enforce the directive regarding curfew revealed violations of rights as some people were handled in an inhuman, degrading manner. In one incident, a lady in Jinja, one Evelyn Namulondo lost her life on the morning of 15th May, 2020 after she was shot by some police officer. In another report, on 10th May 2020 in Kapkwata village, Kween district, LDU personnel enforcing curfew allegedly killed Mwanga and injured one among the twelve others found playing cards at his residence at around 11:00pm.

Read more at:

<https://observer.ug/news/headlines/64798-jinja-market-vendor-shot-for-flouting-curfew-dies->

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/LDU-recruit-shoots-man-dead-injures-another-curfew-operation/688334-5549912-12lqvpj/index.html->

5. The predicament of Ugandans stuck abroad

Following the outbreak and prevalence of Covid-19, some of the Ugandans who wished to return home have not been able to because of the travel bans and closure of international passenger flights. Some of the most affected are the students stuck without the necessary support from the government.

Read more at:

<https://observer.ug/news/headlines/64743-gov-t-pleads-for-patience-on-ugandans-stuck-abroad>

6. Natural disasters caused by the continued rise in the water levels

Following the recent outburst of the rivers in Kasese district; landslides in Kween district; flooding around the areas of Lake Kyoga and Lake Victoria, thousands of people have lost their businesses, many have been displaced, including human rights defenders and remain homeless and susceptible to poor health conditions including contracting Covid-19.



Picture 4: One of the houses inundated as a result of the rise in water levels along Lake Victoria shores

Torrential rain on 21st May 2020 caused some rivers namely Lhubiriha and Rwebyoto overflow in Kasese district causing massive floods which resulted into loss of lives, destruction of homes and rendering hundreds homeless.

According to local media reports, areas around Mpondwe-Bwera were among the worst hit and that this was the second major flash flood event in the area the month the first having happened on 5th May 2020.



Picture 3: Floods in Kasese, Uganda, 21 May 2020.
(Photo: Uganda Red Cross)



Picture 6: Dr Stella Nyanzi, Bajjo and several others protesting against food distribution delay

Find more information at:

<http://floodlist.com/africa/uganda-floods-kasese-may-2020>

Immediate action should be taken by the government to ensure that these now extremely vulnerable persons including human rights defenders are provided with the necessary support.

7. Challenges of access to food

On Monday 18th May, locals in Namungona and Buganda road demonstrated over the delay in the food distribution as many Ugandans continued to starve in their homes amidst the lockdown. Dr Stella Nyanzi, events promoter Andrew Mukasa alias Bajjo and several others were arrested near Buganda Road Court in Kampala as they walked to the Office of the Prime Minister to seek an explanation as to why the government had left several people to starve yet several food donations had been made.

Read more at:

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Dr-Stella-Nyanzi-Bajjo-several-others-arrested-over-food-protest/688334-5556030-106eci9z/index.html>

The arrest of unarmed and peaceful demonstrators by the police violates the right to freedom to assemble and demonstrate as provided under Article 29(d) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

Conclusion

The above are but highlights and a representation of so many other factors within the working environment of human rights defenders that continues to be dynamic and challenging thereby calling for massive and wide support from all relevant stakeholders to address the prevailing human rights issues and challenges. HRCU shall continue to liaise with other human rights organisations, the JLOS sector and other partners to provide support to the HRDs both economically, socially and emotionally.