



## **THE HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE UGANDA (HRCU)**

### **WEEKLY UPDATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND KEY EMERGING ISSUES IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN UGANDA DURING THE PREVALENCE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**ISSUE NO.16: THE WEEK OF 20<sup>TH</sup> JULY – 26<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

During this week, on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020, His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni gave his 19<sup>th</sup> address to the nation concerning the COVID-19 situation in Uganda. He announced further adjustments to the lockdown restrictions through which he allowed the re-opening of saloons and 110 arcades but with clear guidelines to be observed, including wearing of face masks and face shields and the use of temperature guns at the entrances of the business premises. Boda bodas were to resume work on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020 with the riders having customer registration registers, sanitizers, masks and to write down the name of every passenger who must also wear a mask. They would work until 6:00pm. Curfew time was also adjusted from 7:00pm - 6:30am to 9:00pm - 5:30am. Schools, places of worship and border points were to remain closed.

While commenting on the actions of Minister of Health, Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng appearing without wearing a face mask while addressing a group of people in northern Uganda, the President believed that it was not her fault; that the problem was that she put herself in a situation which she could not control and therefore warned political actors not to put themselves in similar situations.

For more information:

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523089/arcades-saloons-boda-bodas-business>

<https://youtu.be/g5CO-NFOCPw>

#### **NATIONAL AND GLOBAL UPDATES ON COVID-19 CASES**

Uganda has so far registered two COVID-19 deaths. The first case was reported on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020 of a 34-year-old female Ugandan in Namisindwa district while the case was reported on 26<sup>th</sup> July of an 80-year-old female Ugandan, resident of Mengo, Kisenyi III in Kampala.

As of Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020, a total of 1,115 Covid-19 cases were confirmed in Uganda. In other parts of the world, Africa had registered 696,207 with 11,708 deaths and globally, there were 15,785,641 infections and 640,016 deaths.

Reference:

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523265/uganda-registers-covid-19-death>

<https://www.independent.co.ug/covid-19-uganda-registers-second-death-an-80-year-old/>

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200726-covid-19-sitrep-188.pdf?sfvrsn=f177c3fa\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200726-covid-19-sitrep-188.pdf?sfvrsn=f177c3fa_2)

## HIGHLIGHTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND KEY EMERGING ISSUES THAT DEVELOPED IN THE COURSE OF THE WEEK

### REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' BILL 2020

On Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, a team of Collaborating partners led by Defenders' Protection Initiative (DPI) together with some Members of Parliament went to the Eastern Region (Mbale district) where they met with human rights defenders and key stakeholders to consult on the Human Rights Defenders' Bill 2020. It is expected that once the consultations are concluded, the mover of the Bill, Hon. Lyandro Komakech will present the Bill before the floor of Parliament since he already received leave to present the Bill.



Left: Group photo of stakeholders after the consultative meeting at Mbale Resort Hotel on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Right: Hon. Lyandro and colleagues during a talk show at Open Gate Radio in Mbale

### FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE, EXPRESSION, ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

On the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020, traders at Premier Arcade along Nabugabo in Kampala continued with their strike protesting the owner's decision to demand them to pay rent for the past four months yet they were all under lockdown. They argued that this was unfair.



Traders say they have no money since their shops were closed due to COVID-19 (Photos by Patrick Kibirango)

Reference:

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523325/traders-continue-strike-landlords-demand-rent-arrears>

### THE POLICE RAIDED RADIO SIMBA AND ARRESTED 4

On the morning of Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020, armed security men raided Bukoto based Radio Simba and arrested four staff who reportedly recorded a video accusing

government of tribalism. Senior security sources revealed that the four included Julius Sserwanja alias Kidomoole, Maliseeri Mbabaali, Uncle Luyuguumo, Peter Ssabakaaki, and Gold Ki MatonoOpeto. Kampala Metropolitan Police Spokesperson Patrick Onyango confirmed the arrest but noted that the Police Spokesperson Fred Enanga would issue a statement. By press time the statement was not yet out.

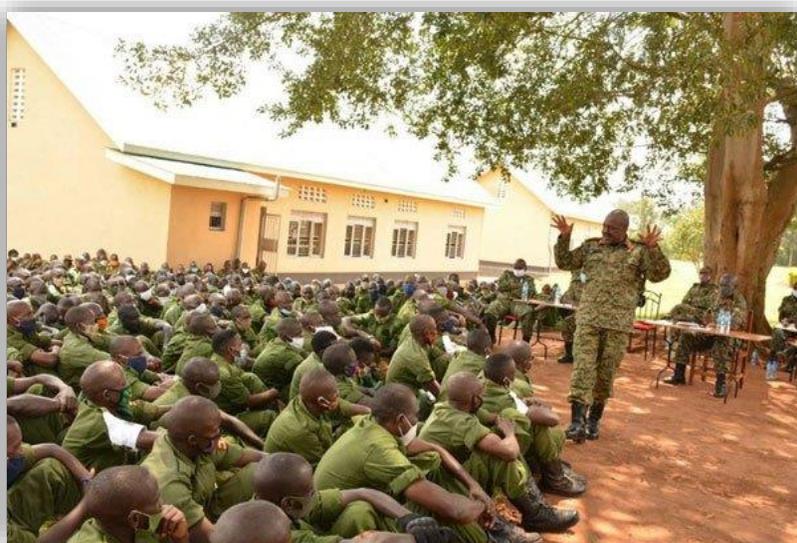


Reference:

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523305/police-raid-radio-simba-arrest>

## **ENFORCEMENT OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY AND PROTECTION FROM INHUMANE TREATMENT**

Following the continued criticism regarding killings and torture of civilians by LDUs while enforcing government guidelines on the containment of corona virus, the Local Defence Unit (LDU) personnel, were recently withdrawn from Kampala Metropolitan Area, to attend refresher training in civil policing and human rights. The training at Kakiri Barracks, which will be done in phases, started on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> July with LDUs from Rubaga Battalion, according to the Defence ministry statement. Despite the human rights violations, the deputy commander of the Land Forces, Maj Gen Sam Kavuma, said the LDUs had curbed crime in Kampala.



The training at Kakiri Barracks, which will be done in phases, started yesterday with LDUs from Rubaga Battalion, according to the Defence ministry statement. PHOTO|UPDF

Reference:

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/LDUs-begin-training-on-human-rights/688334-5596582-1avw4w/index.html>

### **THE NEED FOR APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTANTIVE CHAIRPERSON FOR UGANDA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (UHRC)**

The delayed appointment of a substantive Chairperson of Uganda Human Rights Commission continues to raise great concern especially from human rights defenders as several victims of human rights violations are likely to continue facing violations and abuses of their rights without getting appropriate remedies. According to Mr. Robert Mugisa in his article, "*I can't breathe if Uganda Human Rights Commission Has No Substantive Chairperson*", this delay to appoint a substantive chairperson does not only demoralize the victims of violations but also denies them access to justice.

Reference:

<https://www.watchdoguganda.com/op-ed/20200725/97268/robert-mugisa-i-cant-breathe-if-uganda-human-rights-commission-has-no-substantive-chairperson.html>

### **COURT ASKED TO BLOCK UGANDA LAW SOCIETY SCIENTIFIC ELECTIONS**

Early in the week, following a notice from ULS Secretary Francis Harimwomugasho, dated July 8, 2020 to the effect that a virtual (online) Annual General Meeting (AGM) was slated for August 7 2020 and that attendance is limited to only paid-up members, four lawyers (Araali Kagoro, Ivan Bwowe, Shamim Sserubidde, and Geoffrey Turyamusiima) petitioned High Court Civil Division Kampala contending that the Council did not have power under the Uganda Law Society Act, Cap.278 to summon a virtual AGM. Part of the business scheduled was to pass a resolution to amend ULS Statutory Instruments 2016 Number 10 (Election Standards and Procedures), specifically on Section 11 to allow online elections in the future. The complainants also opposed the blocking non-paid up members from the AGM. They therefore wanted the decision to be quashed on the premise of illegality and disenfranchisement of physically incapacitated lawyers.

Reference:

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523382/court-block-uganda-law-society-scientific-elections>

### **INNOVATION TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH RIGHTS IN UGANDA**

Makerere University psychology academics developed an online application (App) to offer free counseling services to students at Universities. This follows increased rise in suicide cases among students, according to Dr. Rehema Baguma, the leader of the team behind the App. She stated that their UNICARE App, which was available on Google Play store targets students, not only at Makerere but also other universities across the country. It will offer instant messages, voice and emergency helpline for people to call in. The innovators are supported by the Government through the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance in an effort to curb the high rate of graduate unemployment.

For more information:

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523311/makerere-dons-develop-counselling-app>

### **THE FIGHT AGAINST RISING WATER LEVELS AND INCREASED FLOODING**

The Speaker of Parliament Rebecca, Alitwala Kadaga asked the Ministry of Works and Transport to help in the fight against the continued flooding of River Nyamwamba in Kasese district which is likely to result into increased loss of lives.

This was after the Kasese Municipality MP Robert Centenary raised a matter of national importance where he appreciated the government's intervention in the district after the river burst its banks but said the tractors and excavators provided to the district to de-silt the river do not have fuel to operate them. He added that as they prepared for the upcoming rainy season, the river had started flooding again which had put the lives of people in over 160 homes near the river in danger. The legislator wanted the ministry to come to their rescue so that de-silting of the river could get underway.

Reference:

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523337/kadaga-tasks-ministry-kasese-floods>

## **THE ROAD TO 2021 GENERAL ELECTIONS AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

General elections remain a key aspect in a democratic State. According to Justice Ogoola, *"elections under the Constitution are predicated on the doctrine of free and fair, unrestricted interaction as well as the known hallmark of mass public rallies at which candidates and the electorate engage each other."*

However, this is not the case as it was reported on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020 that the Police foiled the People Power meeting in Walukuba that was intended to have candidates vying for various leadership positions in the next general elections particularly those who hail from Eastern Uganda to return their nomination forms to members of People Power's Election Management Committee.

People Power's Deputy Head of Election Management Committee, Samuel Lubega Mukaaku accused Police of making a biased decision against all activities and plans of opposition political groups, yet their NRM party counterparts were successfully conducting similar meetings in the area.



Police officers on guard at Paul Mwiru's premises as a People Power candidate looks on, stranded. (Photos by Donald Kiirya)

Reference:

<https://nilepost.co.ug/2020/07/17/justice-ogoola-scientific-elections-undermine-the-spirit-of-the-constitution/>

and

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1523317/police-foils-people-power-meeting-walukuba>

## **RIGHT TO JUST AND FAIR TREATMENT IN ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS**

Eight top EC officials, including Mr. Rwakoojo, the accounting officer, were verbally fired on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020 amid an on-going parallel IGG investigation into

accusations of corruption and abuse of office in the national electoral body. It is not clear whether their woes are in any way connected to the matters raised in the January 18 whistle-blower's petition to the IGG. Mr. Rwakoojo and other affected officials have not publically spoken on the alleged sacking or forced retirement.



Outgoing EC Secretary Sam Rwakoojo (left) and Chairman Justice Simon Byabakama addressing journalists at the EC offices in Kampala recently

For further information:

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Queries-top-EC-bosses--opt-for-early-retirement-/688334-5598706-sv0n02/index.html>

The Inspectorate of Government spokesperson, Ms. Munira Ali, confirmed investigation into corruption accusations brought against the EC officials. She, however, clarified that the Inspectorate didn't have a hand in the sacking of the eight EC officials since the IGG investigations are on-going.

For more details:

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Top-EC-bosses-fired-amidst-graft-probe/688334-5597338-hd8xn5z/index.html>

## CONCLUSION

As the 2021 general elections draws near and with continued uncertainty on how the new roadmap of a hybrid kind of elections shall be conducted, several human rights defenders anticipate increased human rights violations. There is need for continued documentation advocacy towards ensuring that government works to weed out human rights violations. It is good to note that LDUs are currently undergoing refresher training on civil policing and human rights but this followed continued criticism on killings and torture of Ugandans by the LDUs. More pressure needs to be exerted towards the appointment of a substantive Chairperson for UHRC in order to enable it function fully in order to uphold the principles of justice.

With the saddening reports on COVID-19 deaths in Uganda, HRCU continues to urge HRDs and all citizens to strictly follow the preventive measures by such as hand washing, social distancing and use of face masks.