



THE HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE UGANDA (HRCU)

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

The Week of 31st August – 6th September 2020

Issue No.22

INTRODUCTION

The week of 31st August to 6th September, 2020 was marred by series of serious chaos and violence around various parts of the country during the NRM primaries/elections. Some people lost their lives and many suffered grievous injuries while security agents resorted to the use of tear gas and live bullets in bid to calm the situation. Many questioned whether elections is a do or die event, and whether the situation is a glimpse of what the country should expect during the 2021 general elections. These are questions that only time, will answer.

LATEST UPDATES ON COVID-19 IN UGANDA AND THE REST OF THE WORLD

The situation relating to COVID-19 in Uganda appears to be getting out of hand as daily chunks of infections are registered with an increasing number of deaths and challenges in housing the COVID-19 patients at the health facilities.

From the reports given, over 467 of the 954 people who have in the last one month tested positive in Kampala have not yet been evacuated to treatment in isolation facilities, the Ministry of Health (MOH) revealed on Friday. The ministry said that the process has been hampered by traffic jam and challenges in accessing people's homes. Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, the Health Minister thus requested the patients to isolate themselves and protect their family from catching the virus as they await evacuation.

<https://www.independent.co.ug/hundreds-of-kampalas-confirmed-covid-patients-still-at-home-after-a-month/>

Results from COVID-19 tests done on 5th September 2020 revealed 128 new cases of infections leading to a cumulative total of 3,667. Two (2) deaths were registered from Kampala and Jinja bringing the total COVID-19 deaths to 41, and recoveries to 1,608.

<https://twitter.com/minofhealthug/status/1302506235246379009?s=21>

The Newly Introduced Covid-19 Testing Fees

Several sections of the public like the truck drivers and Members of Parliament rejected the COVID-19 testing fees which were introduced on 27th August 2020 requiring organisations and individuals who desired to know their COVID-19 status to pay a total the sum of 240,500 Shillings effective 1st September 2020. Usher Wilson Owere, the Chairperson General of the National Organisation of Trade Unions - NOTU also joined those opposed to the newly introduced COVID-19 testing. Owere argued that majority of workers in the country earn very little and are in informal employment, adding that subjecting them to pay for COVID-19 testing would only amount to the denial of their rights to health and basic resources that should be provided by the government. He then said that the government was likely to lose the war on COVID-19 should they insist on charging citizens for testing. The truck drivers viewed this as inhumane.

<https://www.independent.co.ug/workers-oppose-covid-19-testing-fees-without-minimum-wage/>

<https://www.independent.co.ug/mps-oppose-govt-move-to-charge-for-covid-19-tests/>

Inadequate Funding

The Ministry of Health is facing serious financial issues in the fight against COVID-19 as several hospitals cry out for more facilitation. Kalangala district taskforce temporarily closed the quarantine centre at Bishop Dunstan Memorial Secondary School due to lack of funds. Daniel Kikoola, the Kalangala Resident District Commissioner said that by end of last month, the funds to maintain the centre had been exhausted. At the time of the closure, there were no suspects at the centre.

<https://www.independent.co.ug/kalangala-quarantine-center-closed-over-lack-of-funds/>

There was anxiety among health and local officials in Arua district, following reports that the COVID-19 treatment facility ran out of space. Newly tested positive cases have now been left in their communities, and not yet linked to care. This was reportedly communicated during an emergency taskforce meeting convened on Wednesday, that Arua hospital COVID-19 treatment centre had 42 active cases surpassing its holding capacity of 35 beds.

<https://www.independent.co.ug/ten-covid-patients-left-in-communities-as-arua-hospital-runs-out-of-space/>

Covid-19 Vaccine Development

There are likelihoods that the COVID-19 vaccine may be produced in limited numbers and therefore the World Health Organisation set on prioritizing a selected few who are deemed to be most at risk.

"Initially, when the supply of COVID-19 vaccine is limited, priority must be given to vaccinating essential workers and those most at risk, or in other words, vaccinating some people in all countries rather than all people in some countries," the World Health Organization (V) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Friday.

According to him, vaccinating essential workers and those most at risk is "not just a moral imperative and a public health imperative, it's an economic imperative;" that as production increased in time, all people everywhere would have access to vaccines.

<https://www.independent.co.ug/covid-19-vaccines-to-be-prioritized-for-some-people-in-all-countries-who-chief/>

The Covid-19 after Effects

Studies carried out in the United States, United Kingdom and Sweden on COVID-19 after-effects show that patients, even asymptomatic ones that were not hospitalised developed other health conditions due to COVID-19. A study published in July in the cardiology journal JAMA showed that 78 people out of 100 who did not have any cardiac abnormality before falling sick had developed abnormalities after being treated for COVID-19.

However, several health officials have noted that there are no mechanisms laid up in place to follow up the thousands of corona virus recovered patients discharged from hospitals. The likelihoods are that these may be exposed to conditions such as fatigue, racing heartbeats, shortness of breath, achy joints, foggy thinking and persistent loss of smell as after-effects of having been infected with COVID-19. In other cases, damage to the heart, lungs, kidneys and also brain have been reported.

Click the link below for more information:

<https://www.independent.co.ug/health-ministry-lacks-follow-up-mechanism-for-discharged-covid-patients/>

Globally, as of 6th September 2020, there were 26,763,217 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 876,616 deaths, reported to WHO.

<https://covid19.who.int/>

The WHO chief Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned countries that were opening their economies to be more serious about suppressing COVID-19 infections to save the world from a disaster that could arise from opening up without a plan. COVID-19 spreads efficiently among clusters of people, with explosive outbreaks linked to gatherings at places such as sports stadiums, schools nightclubs and places of worship.

<https://www.independent.co.ug/kickstarting-economies-without-covid-19-plan-a-recipe-for-disaster-who/>

KEY HUMAN RIGHTS AND OTHER ISSUES THAT DEVELOPED IN THE COURSE OF THE WEEK

Press and Media Freedom

According to Human Rights Network for Journalist - Uganda, a police officer assaulted a journalist in Butambala on 3rd September 2020. Joseph Kinobe, a journalist working with Bukedde Television in Mpigi district was allegedly attacked on 2nd September by the Officer in Charge (OC) Kibibi Police Station, Cyrus Besimbire in Butambala district. He added that the said police officer grabbed him by the shirt thereby tearing it and also grabbed his camera and mobile phone and destroyed the LCD card and the screen respectively. He further informed HRNJ-Uganda that he did not report the matter at Kibibi Central

Police Station on grounds that officers attached to the said police station are biased about the media. HRNJ pledged to follow the matter up until it was resolved.

Human Rights Network for Journalists- Uganda info@hrnjuganda.org

The Road To 2021 General Elections: The NRM Primary Elections

As indicated in the introduction above, that the NRM primaries were marred by chaos, violence, loss of lives and property. Some of the incumbents and ministers from various districts lost during the primaries, some contesting against the results.

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1526344/mafias-stolen-victory-minister-anite>

By 4th September 2020, the Provisional results released showed ministers Evelyn Anite (Investment), Elioda Tumwesigye (Technology), Adolf Mwesigye (Defense), Mary Karoro Okurut (General Duties), Michael Werikhe (Trade), Mwesigwa Rukutana (Labour) and Christopher Kibazanga (Veteran Affairs) had lost and were pondering their next moves.

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Big-winners--losers-NRM-primaries-Werikhe-Kibazanga/688334-5619478-rjb2ubz/index.html>

As such, some primaries in certain districts were postponed because of the violent nature of the supporters. On 4th September 2020, New Vision reported that Mbarara city NRM electoral commission halted the voting exercise for the MP seat for Mbarara City South at Rubiri polling station in Nyamityobora ward citing chaos.

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1526274/voting-polling-station-mbarara-halted-chaos>

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) Electoral Commission also suspended elections in Bukono Constituency in Namutumba district following the killing of one of the candidate's agent. According to Dr. Tanga Odoi, the NRM Electoral Commission chairman, the matters would be investigated and the party had also suspended voting in parts of Sembabule over election violence.

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1526268/minister-namuganza-agent-killed-bukono-nrm-polls-suspended>

One of the incumbents who lost the vote tally count to challenger Naome Kabasharira was charged with incited violence, attempted murder and malicious damage to property. A video clip in which Hon. Mwesigwa Rukutana (Minister for Labour) was seen seizing a gun to shoot at some people circulated on social media since Saturday morning. Several pictures have also been circulating on various forums, showing Rukutana wielding a gun. There were also pictures of the victims who were injured on the head but Rukutana has since denied the charges brought against him.

The deputy Police spokesperson, Polly Namaye, told New Vision on Sunday morning that the Rushenyi MP had been transferred to Mbarara and was being held at Rwizi Regional headquarters in Mbarara, and investigations were underway.

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1526379/rukutana-detention-transferred-mbarara-police>

Anti-Graff Crusaders Want IGG And Chairperson Uganda Human Rights Commission Appointed

The office of the IGG fell vacant on July 5, 2020 after the term of office of Justice Irene Mulyagonja ended. As Ugandans go into polls early next year, anti-graft Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) said there was a need to track down the actions of the politicians to avoid corruption tendencies.

In their joint press statement read to journalists by Action Aid International Uganda country director Xavier Ejoyi, the group urged President Yoweri Museveni to appoint a substantive Inspector General of Government (IGG) to arrest, investigate and prosecute politicians found bribing voters. Ejoyi also said that having no substantial IGG exposes the country to misuse of public funds and abuse of public offices, especially during this period of political campaigns and COVID-19, where the Government is also getting many donations and loans.

They also called for the appointment of the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) chairperson to follow up on the human rights abuses during the electoral process.

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1526312/anti-graft-crusaders-igg-appointed>

Freedom From Torture and Inhumane Treatment

On 3rd September 2020, New Vision reported that the prison boss summoned over torture allegations by the Chief Magistrates' Court in Wakiso district. On July 21st, the complainants sued Kiyimba, Woniala and the Government in the Civil Division of the High Court, demanding compensation over alleged torture. The complainants were arrested and later charged with 'doing a negligent act likely to spread COVID-19, before the Chief Magistrates' Court at Mpigi. The complainants want Haji Kiyimba and Woniala to be held personally liable for their actions. HRAPF advocacy and strategic litigation officer Susan Baluka said whereas Uganda ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture and enacted the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2012, there is still a huge gap when it comes to law enforcement.

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1526229/prison-boss-summoned-torture-allegations>

Conclusion

The trending news on the NRM primaries that was characterized by violence and chaos could be used as a lens to study and project the upcoming 2021 general elections situation. Therefore it is important that the government, security agents and all citizens to strategise by studying the root cause of violence in the NRM primaries and avoid carrying them on to the general elections.

There is a need for collective demand for the appointment of the Chairperson Uganda Human Rights Commission and the Inspector General of Government.

Finally, the COVID-19 situation in Uganda has reached a delicate stage which calls for Ugandans to increase their vigilance in following the Standard Operation Procedures given by the Ministry of Health. COVID-19 is a gruesome illness that needs extra prevention amidst the prayers.