



BUKEDI RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITY INITIATIVES (BRUCI)

CIVIC SPACE IN UGANDA

Reporting Period: April to June 2024.

1. The current political context in Uganda.

In Uganda, the political landscape has not changed over years plus the government too. The politics of Uganda is a presidential republic, in which the President of Uganda is the head of state and the prime minister is the head of government business.

The policies regarding the three freedoms have not changed in Uganda. The non-state entities like terrorists for example the Lord's Resistance Army, and Allied Democratic Forces, and the ADF rebels in Congo have affected the work of the civic space in that area.

The political context in Uganda is narrowed since the control of all high-level governmental oppositions and decision-making position are all occupied by the ruling party officials who suppress the opposition leaders.

2. Incidents of human rights violations.

Three Uganda lawmakers charged with corruption, court papers show

By Reuters

June 13

Three Ugandan ruling party legislators have been charged with corruption for trying to influence a rights body to inflate its budget, according to a charge-sheet seen by Reuters.

Graft is rampant in the east African country but prosecution of top officials, especially those allied to the country's long-ruling President Yoweri Museveni and his ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, is rare. The three legislators - Mutembuli, Paul Akamba and Cissy Namujju Dionizia - were charged with corruption late on Wednesday at the High Court in the capital Kampala.

According to the charge-sheet, they were accused of attempting to influence the chairperson of the state-funded Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) to inflate the organisation's 2024/25 (July-June) budget, in return for giving the lawmakers 20% of the inflated budget.

"Mutembuli, Akamba and Dionizia ... solicited an undue advantage ... by asserting that they were able to exert improper influence over the decision-making of the budget committee of parliament of Uganda to increase the UHRC budget," the charge-sheet said.

The three all pleaded not guilty and were remanded to a maximum- security prison. Asuman Basalirwa, one of the suspects' lawyers, told the court that the charges could not be "categorised as grave," and asked for bail. The judge, Joan Aciro, remanded them until June 14 when they will return for a ruling on the bail application. Last week, Museveni said he received intelligence that some lawmakers were conniving with officials from government departments to inflate their budgets in exchange for a commission. The opposition has long criticised Museveni's government for failing to prosecute top officials for graft, saying the government was prioritising political loyalty over accountability in public finances.

Ugandan court upholds anti-LGBTQ law but says some rights infringed

By Reuters
April 3,

Under the Anti Homosexuality Act, citizens had an obligation to report anyone they suspected of engaging in homosexuality. Uganda's constitutional court refused on Wednesday to annul or suspend an anti-LGBTQ law that includes the death penalty for certain same-sex acts, but voided some provisions that it said were inconsistent with certain fundamental human rights. The legislation, adopted in May last year, is among the world's harshest anti-gay laws and has drawn condemnation from rights campaigners and sanctions from Western nations.

Activists say the law has unleashed a torrent of abuse against LGBTQ people, including torture, rape, arrest and eviction. "We decline to nullify the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023 in its entirety, neither will we grant a permanent injunction against its enforcement," said lead judge Richard Buteera, reading the judgment on behalf of his four colleagues. However, the court struck down certain sections it said were "inconsistent with right to health, privacy and freedom of religion".

The portions of the act that were voided had criminalised the letting of premises for use for homosexual acts and failure to report homosexual acts. Under the Anti-Homosexuality Act, citizens had an obligation to report anyone they suspected of engaging in homosexuality. This requirement violated individual rights, the court found. The government will now have to remove these sections from the law, Edward Ssemambo, a human rights lawyer representing the petitioners, told Reuters.

Gender-based violence ranks as top women's-rights issue that Ugandans want government and society to address

According to AFRO BAROMETER, Majority of citizens see domestic violence as a private rather than criminal matter. Violence against women and girls is prevalent in almost all countries, widely acknowledged as a major public health and human rights concern In line with

the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5, which calls for eliminating all forms of gender-based violence (GBV), the government of Uganda launched a National Gender-Based Violence Action Plan in 2016 that aims to end practices that promote violence against women and girls and to create a framework to ensure support and access to health services and justice for victims (UNHCR, 2016).

GBV is a critical problem in Uganda. The National Survey on Violence in Uganda reported that 95% of Ugandan women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey in Uganda show that GBV is the most important women's-rights issue that citizens say their government and society need to address. Even though a majority of citizens reject the use of physical force against women as "never justified," half say GBV is common in their community.

Most Ugandans think the police take GBV cases seriously, but majorities also see domestic violence as a private rather than a criminal matter and think that women who report GBV to the authorities will face negative reactions from the community.

Uganda Media Sector Working Group released a joint statement on the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day 2024

On 3rd May 2024, Uganda, like in the past years, joined the rest of the global community to commemorate the World Press Freedom Day 2024. The day was proclaimed in 1993 by the United Nations General Assembly. We are marking the Day under the global theme, 'A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis', to highlight the crisis and the role/importance of journalism and freedom of expression in shaping solutions to the impending global disaster.

World Press Freedom Day is annually commemorated to emphasize to governments and the public at large to fulfil their commitments and obligations on press/media freedom; for media professionals and stakeholders to reflect on the state of press freedom and professional ethics; and to mobilise support and solidarity for media practitioners and journalists that are targeted for harm because of their professional duty. We also remember the journalists who lost their lives in the course of their work. At least 99 journalists and media workers were killed in 2023 across the world.

This year, the media fraternity in Uganda is moving in unison under the leadership of the Uganda Media Sector Working Group (UMSWG), to bring attention to the global environmental crisis that has not spared Uganda, and amplify the role of journalism in supporting efforts to combat it. The consortium led by the UMSWG includes: State partners – The Media Council of Uganda, The Uganda Human Rights Commission and the Uganda Communications Commission; as well as non-state partners — The African Centre for Media Excellence, Uganda Editors' Guild, Media Focus on Africa, Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda, Uganda National Academy of Sciences, Health Journalists Network Uganda, Media Challenge Initiative, International Training Programme, Northern Uganda Media Club, Elgon Journalists' Association, Umbrella for Journalists Kasese, and Teso Journalists for Community Empowerment

Dozens Of Ugandan Officials Swept Up in Major Corruption Scandal



Photo: Ugandan citizens protesting corrupt officials. Credit: Faruk Media

NEW YORK | 6 May 2024 (IDN) — In a shocking development, dozens of Uganda’s high-placed ministers and legislators have been accused of stealing from the poor communities they serve in a sprawling scandal that has outraged graft-weary citizens.

Sanctions imposed by Uganda’s Anti-Corruption Court target Parliament Speaker Anita Annet Among as well as Amos Lugoloobi, state minister for finance in charge of planning, former ministers Mary Goretti Kitutu and Agnes Nandutu, a former barmaid and journalist who reportedly turned herself into police.

In the case of Lugoloobi, the New Vision newspaper published a photo of what it said was the minister’s goat shed roofed with government property.

Official corruption is rampant in this East African country, but officials caught in major scandals rarely face criminal charges.

“The charges are highly welcome as we have been having a culture of impunity because (the suspects) have godfathers in the system,” said Marlon Agaba, executive director of the pressure group Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda. “We have known government officials to steal billions of shillings, not stealing iron sheets from the poor.”

Some 26 ministers and 31 legislators have been named in connection with the case. President Yoweri Museveni, often accused of lacking the political will to stem corruption, has now ordered detectives to investigate the case.

“This is unprecedented in the history of the National Resistance Movement administration,” said Ofwono Opondo, a government spokesman.

The scandal came to light when the local New Vision newspaper reported that security officials in eastern Uganda had intercepted government-branded iron sheets being sold by relatives of Kitutu, the minister in charge of Karamoja.

The stolen iron sheets were from a Ugandan government-funded project to house those in Karamoja, which the United Nations Population Fund said is not only one of Uganda's poorest regions but one of the poorest regions in the world with 61% of its population living in "absolute poverty."

"The actions of these individuals, in taking aid from those who need it most, and keeping the proceeds, is corruption at its worst and has no place in society," Deputy Foreign Secretary Andrew Mitchell of Britain said in a statement.

"The Ugandan courts are rightly taking action to crack down on those politicians who seek to line their own pockets at their constituents' expense."

Freeze and travel bans

Sanctions also imposed by Britain include asset freezes and travel bans. They are the first Britain has imposed against individuals in Uganda under its Global Anti-Corruption Sanctions regime that was introduced in April 2021.

Uganda's Parliament has so far rejected the charges against its speaker, stating Among was being punished over her support for the East African nation's anti-gay legislation.

"The Iron sheets have been used as a ruse to conceal the real, unstated but clearly obvious reason for the sanctions—which is the speaker's stance on the recently enacted Anti-Homosexuality Act," Chris Obore, director of communication and public affairs, charged.

Uganda recently enacted an Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023, which penalizes consensual same-sex activity with up to life in prison. Since the rule was first announced last year, it has attracted international condemnation.

A total of 42 people and entities have been blacklisted by Britain under its new corruption-targeting sanctioning powers.

Sanctions were also announced by the U.S. including visa restrictions and reduced support for the government on the grounds that it is a violation of universal human rights.

Britain sanctions three Ugandan officials under anti-corruption laws

By Reuters

April 30, 20243:

LONDON, April 30 - Britain sanctioned the speaker of the Ugandan parliament, Anita Among, and two high profile Ugandan lawmakers on Tuesday, targeting corruption in the east African country for the first time with its sanction's regime.

Among plus Mary Kitutu and Agnes Nandutu, former ministers for the Karamoja region, will be subject to travel bans and asset freezes under the UK's Global Anti-Corruption sanctions regime.

Uganda: Alarming crackdown on environment and human rights defenders



The Observatory has been informed of the alarming crackdown on environment and human rights defenders involved in defending environmental and land rights in the context of oil development projects, in particular the abduction, arbitrary arrest and detention, judicial, physical and moral harassment of eleven human rights defenders, between May 27, 2024 and June 5, 2024.

On June 5, 2024, Mr Adriko Sostein, environment and human rights defender and community member from Kaseeta Parish, Kikuube district in Uganda, was arrested by the officer in charge of the Kaseeta police and a team of Kikuube district police. He was detained at the Central police station in Kikuube and was released on bond on June 6, 2024. Mr Julius Tumwiine and Mr Ezama Chirilo, two other human rights defenders, faced threats and judicial harassment from the police in Kikuube, which was seen surrounding Julius Tumwiine's house on June 5, 2024, at a time when he was not home. Both were allegedly wanted by the police, and consequently Ezama Chirilo reported voluntarily at the police station in presence of a lawyer, where he was put on police bond.

On May 29, 2024, Adriko Sostein, Julius Tumwiine and Ezama Chirilo, held a peaceful protest and marched to deliver a petition to Daqing oil construction in Kikuube. Daqing is a Chinese company in charge of construction of the feeder pipeline linking Kingfisher oil fields to the main oil infrastructure in Hoima. [1] The petition demanded respect for the human rights of local communities and a halt to oil development. On June 1st, 2024, the Resident District Commissioner – the representative of the executive branch and head of security at district level who is nominated by the President of Uganda – called the three defenders who went to deliver this petition and summoned them to a meeting at his office the next day. In the meeting on Sunday, June 2nd, 2024, the Resident District Commissioner made intimidating comments about their human rights activities and pressured

them into writing an "apology letter" to him stating that they would never engage in such an activity again.

On June 4, 2024, Mr Stephen Kwikiriza was reportedly abducted by the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF). At the moment of his abduction, Mr Kwikiriza sent a message to his colleague at Environmental Governance Institute (EGI), confirming his abduction by UPDF officers in civilian clothes. At the date of the publication of this Urgent Appeal, no further communication has been received and Mr Kwikiriza's whereabouts and condition are unknown.

Working as an Observer with EGI in the area of Kingfisher, Mr Kwikiriza is an environment and human rights defender dedicated to promoting the sustainable management of natural resources in the context of developing oil projects in the region. Due to his work as a defender, Mr Kwikiriza had previously received threats from the UPDF deployed at Kingfisher project area.

On May 27, 2024, Messrs Bob Barigye - member of the African Initiative on Food Security and Environment - Uganda (AIFE-Uganda) - Noah Katiiti, Newton Mwesigwa, Julius Byaruhanga - Sector Coordinator for Oil, Gas, Minerals and Professional Services at the Uganda Private Sector Foundation - Desire Ndyamwesigwa, Raymond Binntukwanga, and Jealousy Mugisha Mulimbwa - pastor and community leader - were arrested in Kampala, Uganda, by the Ugandan police during a peaceful demonstration outside the Chinese Embassy. They were held in custody at the Jinja Road Police station in Kampala and charged with unlawful assembly. On May 28, 2024, the seven defenders were released, but at the date of publication of this Urgent Appeal, they are still under investigation and under police bond, thus being required to report to the police whenever they are summoned to. On June 6, 2024, they reported to the police and their bond was extended until June 20, 2024.

The peaceful demonstration was part of simultaneous protests organised in Uganda and Tanzania by civil society groups working with people affected by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project in the two countries. The EACOP is jointly owned and operated by French oil major TotalEnergies, Chinese state-owned enterprise CNOOC, and Tanzanian and Ugandan state owned oil companies. The aim of the demonstration was to hand over to officials of the Chinese embassy an open letter highlighting the economic, social and environmental impacts of the oil projects. The letter, signed by a number of Ugandan and Tanzanian civil society organisations and project-affected communities, expressed their concern at Chinese President Xi Jinping's support for the EACOP project. The demonstrators did not have the opportunity to meet with the Chinese officials



In May 2024, IPI documented at least 25 violations or threats to press freedom in 13 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. These violations affected 20 male journalists and 7 female journalists. Cases of arrests and detention were the most common violations documented, followed by physical, verbal, or online attacks and censorship. The highest number of violations were documented in Nigeria. State actors remain the main perpetrators, responsible for 88 percent of the violations recorded.

In Uganda, on May 18, bodyguards of politician Bobi Wine of the National Unity Platform (NUP), physically attacked, and damaged the cameras of three women journalists covering the burial of the late Pascal Ssekasamba, a UK-based businessman. The journalists who were attacked were Gertrude Mutyaba of NTV, Magret Kayondo of Radio Simba, and Zainab Namusaazi of NBS TV. Other journalists' equipment was destroyed by a group of private bodyguards. One of the overzealous bodyguards, Achileo Kivumbi, targeted journalist Namusaazi of Next Media and damaged her camera. The police reported that they had opened an investigation into the assault.

3. Suggestions for addressing these violations.

- Sensitize the police and army on the media rights and other human rights they should respect
- Make relevant linkages with regional and international human rights mechanisms and processes
- Reprehend and amend the punishment approved in the anti LGBTQI+ act.
- Build alliances and bring all relevant stakeholders to the table
- Communicate with and keep influential decision makers informed about progress made, challenges and opportunities for further advancing the advocacy objective
- Grant the citizens a fair democracy process that does not involve threats to the opposition leaders
- Volunteer or donate to a global organization
- Follow the rule of law and apply justice to those named in corruption scandals
- Grant the journalists their freedom to operate and do their work because they are the eyes and ears of the public.