



BUKEDI RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITY INNITIATIVES (BRUCI)

CIVIC SPACE IN UGANDA

Reporting Period: July to September 2024.

1. Describe 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.

Uganda exhibits mid-range performance across the categories of Rule of Law and Participation, while exhibiting low-range performance in the categories of Representation and Rights of the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) framework. Over the past five years, it has experienced notable declines in Economic Equality, Participation, Civil Society and Civic Engagement. Uganda is a landlocked and low-income country, largely reliant on agriculture. Despite the endurance of low levels of human development, Uganda has maintained relatively brisk economic growth driven by investments in the oil sector.

2. Incident of human rights violations.



On July 30, 2024, The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), requested the urgent intervention in the following situation in Uganda. The Observatory has been informed about acts of harassment against the human rights organisation

Students for Global Democracy (SGD) and its members, including the arbitrary arrest and subsequent release of SGD Founder and Policy Advisor, Mr **Mike Gesa Munabi**, and SGD field officer, Mr **Johnbosco Mutyaba**. SGD is a student-led non-profit and non-partisan organisation founded in 2005 that inspires young people, principally students, to adopt and promote principles of leadership, good governance and sustainability with the goal of greater youth participation in democratic processes and sustainable development efforts in Uganda and the outside world.

On July 23, 2024, Johnbosco Mutyaba, was arrested at the Central Police Station in Kampala as he sought the release of pro-democracy student activists, with whom SGD works as part of their Uganda university chapters. The students had been arrested following the #march2parliament protests that took place the same day against the rampant corruption in government institutions, especially the Ugandan Parliament. Mr Mutyaba was released on the same evening on police bond without any charge.

36 opposition members charged with terrorism offences

On 29 July 2024, Ugandan authorities charged 36 opposition party members with terrorism-related offences. Those charged included members of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), one of Uganda's biggest opposition parties. The 36 people received the charges after they were deported from Kenya, where they had travelled to attend a training course. The prosecution alleged that the 36 individuals had travelled to Kenya with the intent to provide or receive terrorism training. During their arrest, the police are alleged to have beaten and tortured the opposition members. The accused were reportedly unable to enter a plea, as terrorism charges are classified as capital offences, requiring trial in a higher court. Human rights organizations expressed deep concern, accusing the government of weaponizing terrorism laws to silence dissent.

August 2024

LRA commander convicted of crimes against humanity in landmark case

As the first Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) commander to be tried by a Ugandan court, Thomas Kwoyelo was found guilty of



dozens of crimes against humanity on 13 August 2024. Kwoyelo was convicted of dozens of atrocities committed during the LRA insurgency. A child soldier-turned rebel commander, Kwoyelo has been in custody since 2009. Rights group International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) described the trial, which had faced years of delays, as a milestone in the country's efforts to hold war criminals accountable. The trial is also the first atrocity case to be tried under the International Crimes Division, a special division of the High Court, that was established in 2008 to try international crimes. Human rights groups welcomed the verdict as a crucial step toward justice for victims of the LRA's brutal campaign. Kwoyelo is yet to be sentenced.

NUP youth leaders arrested over protesting parliamentary sitting in Gulu



Brian Jakisa Mungu (C) NUP Coordinator in Acholi flanked by Samuel Okello Sebbi (R), the NUP Mobilizer in North addresses the press last week in Gulu city. PHOTO URN

Gulu, Uganda | THE INDEPENDENT | The Police have arrested two National Unity Platform (NUP) youth leaders over an alleged planned protest against the first regional Parliamentary sitting in Gulu City.

The suspects were picked up Monday morning from the party's regional offices in Pece-Laroo Division in Gulu City. Their arrest came just a day before the regional Parliamentary sitting scheduled to take place from August 28th to 30th at Kaunda Parade Grounds in Gulu City.

Police identified the suspects as Samuel Okello Sebbi alias Sebastian Ogoni 30, the NUP Mobilizer for Northern Uganda, and Brian Jakisa Mungu 32, NUP Coordinator in-charge of Acholi Subregion.

Aswa West Police Spokesperson David Ongom Mudong told Uganda Radio Network that the suspects were arrested in possession of placards with inciting messages against the regional Parliamentary sitting.

Mudong says the suspects have been charged with incitement to violence.

He however notes that the suspect's arrest was largely motivated by an old case in which they had been accused of committing assault and incitement to violence but had been on the run.

According to the charge sheet seen by Uganda Radio Network, the Police charged Ogoni with incitement to violence contrary to section 51 (a) of the penal code act reportedly committed in November 2023.

It's alleged on a fateful day, the suspect and others still at large on November 8, 2023, while at Limo Cell, Pece-Laroo Division without lawful excuse used a public address system and made statements that "Balaalo must go" calculated to bring death, or physical injury to Balaalo community living in Acholi land.

Meanwhile, Jakisa Mungu was charged by the Police with assault occasioning actual bodily harm contrary to section 236 of the Penal Code act. The Police alleged that on April 8, 2024, while at Forgod Center in Gulu City assaulted Emmanuel Pacoto thereby occasioning actual bodily harm.

Mudong says the suspects will appear in court on charges that have already been sanctioned by the state attorney while the fresh charge is still under police investigation.

Caesar Lubangakene, the NUP Northern Region Spokesperson however says the arrests are politically motivated since NUP has been against the regional Parliamentary sitting with its leaders publicly boycotting the event.

Lubangakene says their party members were brutally arrested while preparing to address the press and notes that such actions erode public trust in law enforcement and undermine the principles of democracy, freedom of expression, and assembly.

The regional Parliamentary sitting which will be held in four traditional regions of Northern, Eastern, Central, and Western Uganda has attracted criticism from a section of Ugandans who describe it as an unnecessary burden to the taxpayers. It's estimated that the sittings will cost a total of 20 billion shillings with each region spending 5 billion shillings.

Leader of Opposition in Parliament Joel Ssenyonyi early this month noted that the opposition members from NUP will boycott the regional parliamentary sitting citing it as an unjustifiable waste of public resources.

Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine was shot in the leg during a clash with police near Kampala, leaving him "seriously injured," according to his party, the National Unity Platform.



Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, was helped into a car by supporters after the incident in Bulindo, Wakiso District. It is unclear whether he was hit by a bullet or a tear gas canister, but images showed a bleeding wound below his left knee.

Wine, a prominent opposition figure who contested the 2021 presidential election against President Yoweri Museveni, has often faced violent confrontations with police. However, this is the first time he has been injured in such a manner. He is currently receiving treatment at a local hospital.

The police claimed Wine defied advice against holding a street procession, leading to an altercation. They stated that an investigation into the alleged shooting would be conducted.

Wine's party condemned the incident, calling it an attempt on his life. Wine, a former entertainer turned politician, is highly popular among young Ugandans. Since entering politics, he has faced numerous challenges, including blocked rallies, harassment, and physical assaults by security forces. Museveni, who has ruled Uganda since 1986, has resisted calls to retire, and Uganda has never seen a peaceful transfer of power since its independence in 1962.

Landslide at Uganda rubbish dump kills 21

August 2024



At least 21 people are now known to have died after a landslide at a massive rubbish dump in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, police have said.

Rescuers are continuing to dig through the waste in the hope of finding more survivors after the landslide, which followed weeks of

torrential rain.

The 36-acre (14-hectare) Kiteezi landfill is the only one serving the whole of Kampala, a city home to an estimated four million people. Kampala Mayor Erias Lukwago told the AFP news agency it was "a disaster [that] was bound to happen", and that "many, many more could be still buried".

Uganda protester sexually assaulted in police cell - lawyer

26 July 2024

A Ugandan activist, one of dozens detained this week for participating in banned demonstrations, was sexually assaulted in custody, his lawyer has said.

More than 90 youths were arrested and some were charged with being a public nuisance following anti-corruption protests that hit the capital, Kampala.

Some of those released from detention have also reportedly said they had been sexually assaulted while in police cells, sparking widespread criticism. But police denied the allegation.

The two days of anti-corruption demonstrations went ahead on Tuesday and Thursday despite a warning from President Yoweri Museveni that the protesters were "playing with fire".

The protesters, inspired by recent anti-tax



demonstrations in Kenya, were demanding the resignation of the parliamentary speaker, who has been accused of corruption, which she has denied.

But the Ugandan riot police quickly stopped the protests, bundling several young activists, including a prominent TV presenter, into the back of Lorries.

Some are facing a variety of charges but an unknown number remain in police custody, local media reported.

Referring to the allegations of sexual assault his client experienced, lawyer Eron Kiiza said while it was not common for people to be attacked like this in police cells it did happen.

"He was sodomised immediately after he was detained," he told the BBC.

The US embassy in Kampala said in a statement: "We urge that any allegations of individuals assaulted in detention be investigated and perpetrators be held accountable."

However, police spokesperson Kituuma Rusoke dismissed the allegations as "unfounded" and "malicious".

"The police are very conscious of the rights of suspects and take their responsibilities seriously," Mr Rusoke added in a statement.

Mr Kiiza explained that the police believe the protesters are backed by foreign funders - a reference to those who have cut funding or were critical of Uganda for adopting the world's harshest anti-homosexuality laws last year.

"The police think that gay people are funding the protests," he said, adding that his client was told during the assault: "'Now you earn it.'

"It happens in the wake of desperation of some guys in the police [who are trying] to find a connection between the protests and the so-called foreign funders," the lawyer said.

"It is like a revenge act."

Mr Kiiza said he had medical documents that show the sexual abuse and he would use them to sue the authorities once his client was done with treatment and rehabilitation.

He declined to name his client or the station where the alleged abuse took place, citing security fears.

Other activists, both male and female, were also sexually abused while in detention, opposition leader Bobi Wine has alleged.

"Only a few of them had the courage to publicly speak about their ordeal. Very many of them have reported to us but fear or feel ashamed to speak about it in public," Bobi Wine, a former pop star whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, added.

The allegation has sparked uproar on social media with Ugandans calling for an independent investigation into the matter.

"If true, the people doing that may the Lord judge you!" Youth Minister Balaam Barugahara Ateenyi, posted on X.

The minister acknowledged that the allegations were dehumanising and said the country's police chief should investigate them.

On Thursday, President Museveni praised the police for shutting down the protests, which he said had been funded by "foreign sources".

"Very bad things" would be revealed in court about the protesters, he added in his post on X.

Amnesty International has called for an immediate and unconditional release of all those who were arrested.

"The heavy-handed tactics used by the Ugandan government to stifle and silence peaceful protesters show a manifest clampdown on dissent," the rights group added in a statement.

Olympian Rebecca Cheptegei dies after being set alight by ex-boyfriend

5 September 2024



Olympic athlete Rebecca Cheptegei has died days after being doused in petrol and set on fire by a former boyfriend.

The 33-year-old Ugandan marathon runner, who competed in the recent Paris Olympics, had suffered extensive burns after Sunday's attack.

The authorities in north-west Kenya,

where Cheptegei lived and trained, said she was targeted after returning home from church with her two daughters.

Her father, Joseph Cheptegei, said that he had lost a "very supportive" daughter. Fellow Ugandan athlete James Kirwa told the BBC about her generosity and how she had helped out other runners financially.

A report filed by a local administrator alleged the athlete and her ex-partner had been wrangling over a piece of land. Police say an investigation is under way.

Cheptegei, from a region just across the border in Uganda, is said to have bought a plot in Trans Nzoia county and built a house to be near Kenya's elite athletics training centres.

Attacks on women have become a major concern in Kenya. In 2022 at least 34% of women said they had experienced physical violence, according to a national survey.

"This tragedy is a stark reminder of the urgent need to combat gender-based violence, which has increasingly affected even elite sports," Kenya's Sports Minister Kipchumba Murkomen said.

Different organisations within the UN have also spoken out on the issue.

"We join the UN Population Fund and UN Women in strongly condemning [Cheptegei's] violent murder," spokesperson for the UN secretary-general Stephane Dujarric is quoted by the AFP news agency as saying.

Uganda: the authorities continue to crack down on human rights defenders opposing oil development projects

05/09/2024



72 arrests in August 2024 alone. The alarming numbers mark a new escalation in the repression of those voices denouncing the human rights and environmental impacts of projects in Uganda's oil frontier. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) condemns the latest wave of detentions and urges authorities to immediately end their clampdown on civil society.

Paris, 5 September 2024- Ugandan authorities have once again intensified their repression of activists protesting the oil mega-projects that are being developed in the country's Lake Albert region. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has documented at least 81 arrests and detentions having taken place since May 2024, 72 of which in August alone.

"Ugandan authorities must immediately put an end to their repeated attempts to intimidate human rights defenders and affected communities. These voices are critical to the protection of human rights and the environment in light of the huge risks these projects pose", said Sacha Feiera bend, Senior Programme Officer on business and human rights at FIDH.

Regular protests have been recently held across Uganda and Tanzania as the construction of large-scale oil sites has accelerated. Ventures include the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), Kingfisher and Tilenga projects which are owned and operated by the French company Total Energies and the Chinese state-owned enterprise China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) in cooperation with the governments of Uganda and Tanzania.

FIDH has received multiple reports of judicial and moral harassment, threats and intimidation targeting activists working on these projects, including one case of torture and incommunicado detention.

"Companies and investors involved in these projects have a crucial responsibility to push for stronger measures for accountability and protection against these abuses. They must use their leverage on Ugandan authorities to stop all violence and harassment against human rights and environmental defenders", Mr. Feierabend added.

If Uganda has experienced a shrinking space for civil society for years, there has been a specific uptick in repression in the last four months as oil-related protests have become more frequent. On 26 August, 21 activists were arrested in Kampala as they were marching towards the Parliament and the head offices of TotalEnergies and CNOOC to hand in a petition against EACOP. One of them was released, while the 20 others were remanded to prison until 5 September and are still detained. On 9 August, 47 students peacefully protesting in the capital were arrested by police officers before being released the next day. On 5 August, three Ugandan activists and one Belgian activist were arrested while trying to reach the Chinese Embassy, and then released.

13 August 2024

EU official told open Democracy that country’s rights violations are ‘not widespread’ despite draconian anti-gay law



On 8 August, 2015, Ugandan activists gathered for a gay pride rally in Entebbe, celebrating one year since the overturning of the 2014 anti-homosexuality law, but a similar 2023 law was passed. ISAAC KASAMANI /AFP via Getty Images)

The European Union claims to stand up for human rights, the rule of law, transparency in government and peaceful, democratic elections. Yet in recent years it has allowed one of its partners, Uganda, to repeatedly violate these ideals.

In 2020 and 2021, President Yoweri Museveni’s government oversaw the most violent election cycle in Ugandan history. At least 54 people were killed during campaign season, more than any election season before. When the dust was settled, Museveni secured his sixth term and 35th year in power. In January 2021, Parliament passed the repressive 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act into law and was soon after embroiled in a series of corruption and embezzlement scandals. In July 2024, over 100 young people were arrested and charged for peacefully marching against corruption and wanton expenditures by the government – in what constitutional lawyers have condemned as a violation of their right to peaceful assembly.

The EU has previously withheld funds for countries where human rights have been abused; suspending financial support for Niger following last year’s coup, and for Ethiopia in late 2020 amid the atrocities being committed by the government in the Tigray war. In 2013, it cancelled €13m of aid to Gambia over a lack of progress in human rights, in part because of a law against homosexuality. In each of these instances, the EU eventually resumed its flow of aid after apparently being satisfied that change was on the horizon.

But it has seemingly turned a blind eye to the egregious state acts that threaten human rights, freedoms and lives in Uganda – including the killing of protesters, arbitrary detention of political dissidents and prevalent infringement on LGBTIQ rights. Publicly, the EU has only issued statements of concern, with an official telling open Democracy that the rights violations against Uganda’s queer community were “not assessed” to be “widespread and systematic”.