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The State of the World's Human Rights; Uganda 2025

Authorities used torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary arrests and detentions against actual and perceived government opponents. The Uganda Human Rights Commission held tribunals addressing the use of torture and unlawful detention, awarding compensation to survivors of human rights violations. Authorities insisted on trying civilians in military courts in violation of a Supreme Court ruling that found the practice to be unconstitutional. Security forces assaulted journalists and cracked down on peaceful protests, while opposition party offices were raided. LGBTI people faced numerous human rights violations and continued to be discriminated against under the Anti-Homosexuality Act. Uganda's support for nearly 2 million refugees and asylum seekers remained severely underfunded. The construction of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline continued to raise environmental and human rights concerns, including threats to communities and wildlife habitats.

Background

In June the ruling National Resistance Movement party announced that Yoweri Museveni, the president since 1986, would run for re-election in 2026. In September the Electoral Commission approved his candidacy. Meanwhile, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, President Museveni's son and the Chief of Defence Forces, used his X account to issue death threats and incite violence against opposition leaders, members and supporters, and other government critics. Those threatened included the National Unity Platform (NUP) party leader and presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi (also known as Bobi Wine), and the leader of the People's Front for Freedom party, Kizza Besigye. The X posts were later deleted.

Torture and other ill-treatment

On 11 February the Uganda Human Rights Commission, an official body established to investigate and monitor human rights violations, began a series of tribunal sessions nationwide. The tribunals handled cases of alleged torture and unlawful detention, among other violations by security agencies. They handed down five rulings, awarding more than UGX 300 million (around USD 87,000) to victims of human rights violations that occurred in various districts. The Commission warned the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) and the police against engaging in acts of torture and extrajudicial killings, which it emphasized were explicitly forbidden under Article 221 of the Constitution.

On 27 April, Eddie Mutwe, Robert Kyagulanyi's bodyguard, was forcibly disappeared following his abduction by unidentified armed men near the capital, Kampala. On 1 May, in an X post that was later deleted, Muhoozi Kainerugaba claimed responsibility for Eddie Mutwe's disappearance and torture in detention. He said he had beaten him and shaved his head, and he threatened to continue the torture. Eddie Mutwe was held incommunicado until 5 May when UPDF officers took him to Masaka Court where, according to the justice minister, he was "in a visibly weak condition" and showed "signs of torture". Eddie Mutwe's lawyer told the media that Eddie Mutwe had been subjected to electrocution during his detention. The court charged him with aggravated robbery and assault in connection with an alleged incident in 2024. He remained in detention at the end of the year.

Unfair trials

In January, Uganda's Supreme Court ruled the trials of civilians by military courts to be unconstitutional, ordering the transfer of such cases to civilian courts. The decision followed the military prosecution of Ugandan nationals Kizza Besigye (see above) and Obeid Lutale, who were abducted in Nairobi, Kenya, in November 2024 and unlawfully transferred to Uganda to face charges relating to security and possession of firearms. Although their case was later moved to a civilian court, they remained in Luzira Prison.

In June, President Museveni signed into law the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (Amendment) Act, 2025, which allowed for civilians to be tried in military courts. The law used vague provisions that targeted civilians accused of military-related offences, including acquiring arms or equipment for violent acts, impersonating military officers, or collaborating with military personnel to commit offences.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

On 7 January a Kampala military court sentenced human rights lawyer Eron Kiiza to nine months' imprisonment for "contempt of court". This followed his arrest for protesting when soldiers blocked his access to a courtroom area designated for defence lawyers. He was there for the arraignment hearing of his clients Kizza Besigye and Obeid Lutale. During his arrest he was beaten. He said that he was also tortured by military personnel during detention. On 4 April the High Court granted him bail.

On 17 July, security agents arbitrarily arrested Robert Kayingo, a Ugandan-South African lawyer and leader of the opposition Ugandan Federal Alliance party, on his arrival at Entebbe International Airport from South Africa. He was held incommunicado, despite a court order requiring his appearance, before being forcibly deported to South Africa on 13 August. Robert Kayingo said he was held in isolation and subjected to threats and other psychological intimidation during his detention.

In November and December, at least 400 NUP members were arbitrarily arrested and detained during Robert Kyagulanyi's various presidential campaign rallies. Some were released on bail while most remained in detention.

Enforced disappearances

On 26 August, UPDF officers abducted Sam Mugumya, secretary general of the Forum for Democratic Change Youth League and a former aide to Kizza Besigye, in the city of Mbarara. His fate and whereabouts remained undisclosed despite a ruling on 5 September from the High Court in Kampala ordering the government and the UPDF to produce him. The UPDF publicly denied holding him.

On 1 October, armed men in military uniform and wearing masks abducted Kenyan human rights activists Bob Njagi and Nicholas Oyoo in Kampala after they attended Robert Kyagulanyi's election campaign rally. Their whereabouts were undisclosed until 8 November when President Museveni confirmed they had been arrested by security services for being "experts in riots". They were freed the same day and handed over to the Kenyan authorities. They said they had been tortured in detention.

Freedom of expression

On 13 March, security forces attacked tens of journalists who were covering parliamentary by-elections in multiple polling stations in Kawempe, Kampala. The officers also damaged and confiscated their equipment. The journalists had been documenting arrests of people accused of disrupting the voting process. Police authorities said they would investigate formal complaints filed at Kawempe Police Station by the victims.

In March, journalists from NTV Uganda and the *Daily Monitor* newspaper were banned from covering stories about the presidency. In October, these news outlets were also banned from covering parliamentary proceedings.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 17 February, police arrested Kampala City Deputy Lord Mayor, Doreen Nyanjura, and activists Ingrid Turinawe, Faridah Nangonzi, Shadiya Namubiru and Phionah Kabayinza, near Arua Park in Kampala. They were protesting against the detention of Kizza Besigye and Obeid Lutale in violation of the Supreme Court ruling (see above, Unfair trials). The next day the five women were charged at Buganda Road Chief Magistrate's Court with public nuisance and remanded in custody at Luzira Prison. They were released on bail three weeks later.

Freedom of association

Between February and June, police and UPDF officers cordoned-off and raided NUP party premises in Kampala, including its headquarters, on four occasions. During the raids, security forces fired live ammunition in the air and in some cases made forced entries to conduct searches. The police spokesperson said the search was part of an investigation into "illegal

military training at the party premises". In February, Muhoozi Kainerugaba said on X that he had ordered the raids.

LGBTI people's rights

The Supreme Court did not deliver its decision on an appeal against the Constitutional Court's decision in 2024 to uphold provisions in the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023. The provisions discriminated against LGBTI people and carried harsh penalties, including the death penalty, for "aggravated homosexuality" and up to 20 years' imprisonment for the "promotion of homosexuality".

The Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum NGO documented 194 cases of human rights violations against LGBTI people. These violations often involved targeting people based on their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression of their sexuality. They included 71 cases of violence or threats, 48 arrests on sexuality-related charges, 60 home evictions and 15 instances of employment discrimination.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

In July the US and Ugandan governments entered a bilateral agreement that would allow the USA to deport to Uganda third-country nationals who had been refused asylum in the USA but were unable to return safely to their country of origin.

According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, Uganda hosted 1,971,983 refugees and asylum seekers, an increase of almost 154,000 people compared to 2024. Most new arrivals entered the country from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan or Sudan. As of 31 August, UNHCR had received only around 32% of its USD 361 million funding requirement for Uganda, compared to the 42% received in the same period of 2024. It said the effects of the deficit included high rates of school dropouts, and shortages of food, water and medicine, which increased malnutrition among children.

Right to food

According to the 2025 Global Hunger Index, Uganda ranked 87th out of 123 countries. It categorized the country's hunger level as "serious", with 22% of the population undernourished and 3.9% of children dying before their fifth birthday.

Right to a healthy environment

In March, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline Project Ltd announced the "closure of its first tranche of external financing" for the construction of a 1,443km underground fossil fuel pipeline to be used to transport crude oil from Kabale town in the Hoima district of western

Uganda to Tanzania's Tanga Port (see Tanzania entry). The project raised environmental and human rights concerns as it threatened global efforts to reduce carbon emissions and passed through human settlements and wildlife areas, agricultural land and water sources. The project also undermined Uganda's NDC commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 22% by 2030.

