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## Amnesty International Report 2015/16 - Uganda

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### Republic of Uganda

Head of state and government: **Yoweri Kaguta Museveni**

**Police brutality and restrictions of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly increased. Attacks against activists, journalists and other media workers continued with impunity. Opposition politicians seeking to participate in the national elections scheduled for early 2016 were arrested and detained, along with their supporters.**

### BACKGROUND

The year was dominated politically by preparations for the national elections, scheduled for early 2016. High-level splits within the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) resulted in former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi announcing his intention to run for presidential office as an independent candidate. Police brutality, arbitrary arrests, torture and the unlawful disruption of numerous public assemblies all subsequently increased. Opposition political parties and their supporters were harassed, arrested and detained.

Discrimination, harassment and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people continued with impunity. The authorities' hostility towards civil society organizations and human rights defenders continued. Parliamentary debates took place around the new Non-Governmental Organizations Bill, which was passed by Parliament in November.

### POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES

The government oversaw the recruitment and training of many thousands of "Crime Preventers", a militarized network of community policing volunteers, believed to be linked to serious human rights violations across the country.

### TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

On 16 July, Vincent Kaggwa, a 25-year-old spokesperson of the NRM "Poor Youth" was arrested at his home in Wandegaya, Kampala, by security officers. He was detained for four days, during

which he was tortured and questioned about his political support for former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi.

On 14 September, Amama Mbabazi's head of security, Christopher Aine, was arrested in Kampala. He was blindfolded, driven to an unidentified "safe house", and tortured before being released on 17 September. Iron bars and canes were used to beat him on several parts of his body.

Reports indicated at least 10 separate cases of assault, possible torture and unlawful arrest by "Crime Preventers" from September 2014 to August 2015.

## **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

Journalists and other media workers continued to face attacks from the police as well as harassment and intimidation in the course of their work, particularly in rural areas.

On 12 January, cameraman Andrew Lwanga was assaulted by police while filming a gathering of youth activists, the Jobless Brotherhood. He sustained severe injuries, requiring hospital admission. A criminal trial against the alleged perpetrator was ongoing.

On 23 January, radio journalists Gerald Kankya and Simon Amanyire were attacked by a mob in Fort Portal, Western Region.

On 8 July, the Uganda Communications Commission issued a document to all broadcasters, cautioning against "negative and unprofessional trends such as lack of balance, sensationalism, incitement, abusive language and relying on unauthorized and unreliable sources of information". Many media observers saw this directive as an attack on freedom of expression in the run-up to the 2016 elections.

On 14 October, journalist Alfred Ochwo was arrested and subsequently assaulted by police officers after reporting on the arrest of Kyadondo East MP Ssemujju Ibrahim Nganda.

In July, disclosures by WikiLeaks revealed commercial discussions between the Office of the President and surveillance firm Hacking Team. In October, Privacy International reported on the sale and use of the intrusion malware software to the Ugandan military to target real or perceived political opponents. Privacy International also reported on the installation of FinFisher "access points" in Parliament, key government institutions and major hotels. The government denied these claims.

## **FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY**

Throughout the year, numerous public assemblies organized by opposition political parties were disrupted or prevented from taking place by the Uganda Police Force. The Public Order Management Act 2013 was routinely used as the justification, with organizers often being placed under "preventive arrest".

On 9 July, Amama Mbabazi and former President of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) Kizza Besigye were separately arrested and prevented from participating in planned political events. Both were placed under "preventive arrest". Over the course of the following days, 14 youth activists were arrested and detained, including seven arrested at the conclusion of a peaceful press conference.

On 9 September, the police were deployed in Soroti, Eastern Region, in large numbers, ahead of a public gathering organized by Amama Mbabazi. Eyewitnesses and others reported that police used tear gas and rubber bullets against participants.

On 10 September, Amama Mbabazi was forced to abandon a consultative meeting planned in Jinja, Eastern Region, after police used excessive force to block his route and escorted him back to Kampala. Prior to his planned arrival, police used rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse several hundred of his supporters. Tear gas canisters were fired into a primary school yard.

On 10 October, Kizza Besigye attempted to travel with a convoy of his political team to Rukungiri. The Uganda Police Force prevented the planned public assembly from taking place. Kizza Besigye, along with members of his entourage, was arrested and detained. On the same day, FDC activist Fatuma Zainab was arrested and undressed by three police officers, prompting national outrage. On 15 October, Kizza Besigye was again arrested and placed under preventive arrest.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

On 27 November, Parliament passed the Non-Governmental Organizations Act 2015. The new law, not yet assented to by President Museveni, imposes criminal and civil penalties on organizations for engaging in activities that are "prejudicial to the interests of Uganda or the dignity of the people of Uganda". The law fails to conform to regional and international human rights standards, including the right to freedom of association guaranteed under the Constitution.

Throughout the year, the offices of several human rights NGOs were broken into or otherwise targeted. On 30 June, the offices of Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda were broken into. The organization lost several computers, laptops and documents. On 17 July, the offices of Uganda Land Alliance were broken into, on the outskirts of Kampala. A security guard was killed in the course of the attack.

In July, the Uganda Registration Services Bureau began investigations into the Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies for allegedly "de-campaigning" government programmes.

On 17 October, the offices of Soroti Development Association and NGOs Network were broken into.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

In May, Ugandan singer Jemimah Kansime was arrested and jailed after releasing a music video that reportedly violated provisions of the Anti-Pornography Act 2014. A Constitutional Court challenge against the law remained pending.

## **RIGHTS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX PEOPLE**

Attacks against persons on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity continued throughout the year, with an increase in reported cases in the latter half of the year.

A draft of the Prohibition of Promotion of Unnatural Sexual Practices Bill made available in 2014 had yet to be debated by Parliament. The draft law constituted a continuation of the discriminatory ethos of the nullified Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) 2014. The new bill would create criminal sanctions for "promoting" so-called "unnatural sexual practices" which included consensual same-sex conduct between adults. Like the AHA, the Bill would criminalize advocacy, education and health care for the LGBTI community.

## **INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE**

On 6 January, Dominic Ongwen, a senior commander in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was taken into custody by US forces in the Central African Republic, and subsequently transferred to

the custody of the ICC. Dominic Ongwen was indicted by the ICC in 2005 for crimes committed in Gulu, Northern Region, in 2004. He faced three counts of crimes against humanity and four counts of war crimes. On 10 September, the ICC pre-trial chamber recommended to the ICC Presidency that Dominic Ongwen's confirmation of charges hearing be heard in Uganda.

ICC arrest warrants for Joseph Kony, the LRA leader, and two other LRA commanders remained in force. The men were still at large at the end of the year.

On 30 March, Joan Kagezi, head of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions Anti-Terrorism and War Crimes Division, was shot dead by undisclosed gunmen in Kampala.

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