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Republic of Uganda

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

The rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly were severely restricted in the context of general elections marred by irregularities. Human rights defenders faced new restrictions on their activities and some organizations were harassed. The rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people continued to be violated.

BACKGROUND

Uganda held its fifth presidential and parliamentary elections on 18 February. The Commonwealth election observation mission said the election fell short of key democratic benchmarks. The EU's election observation mission said the election took place in an "intimidating atmosphere", with the police using excessive force against opposition politicians, media workers and the general public. President Museveni was declared the winner on 20 February. He had already been in power for 30 years.

On 1 March, Amama Mbabazi, an opposition presidential candidate, filed a petition in the Supreme Court contesting the election result on the grounds that the incumbent party bribed voters, used public servants and state resources in political activities, and interfered with opposition activities. On 9 March, when affidavits were due to be submitted in court, files and computers were stolen from the offices of two of his lawyers. On 31 March, the Supreme Court ruled that there was not enough evidence of irregularities that would have affected the election result.

FREEDOMS OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Police severely restricted the rights of political opposition parties to freedom of association and peaceful assembly before, during and after the elections.

Three days before the elections, Kizza Besigye, presidential candidate for the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), was arrested as he headed towards a campaign rally. The police subsequently barricaded the road leading to his house, effectively placing him under house arrest, on the grounds that they had intelligence that he intended to cause unrest. On 20 February he was arrested again when he tried to leave his house to obtain detailed copies of the results from the Electoral Commission in order to contest them.^[1] On 12 May, the day before Yoweri Museveni was to be sworn in as President, a video appeared online showing Kizza Besigye being sworn in, claiming to be the people's President. The police immediately arrested him and charged him with treason. The case was continuing at the end of the year.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In the run-up to the elections, security officials attacked media outlets they deemed critical of government policies and actions.

On 20 January, Endigyito FM, a privately owned radio station, was closed down after opposition candidate Amama Mbabazi was a guest on a show.

On 13 February, police entered Radio North FM in Lira, northern Uganda, and arrested journalist Richard Mungu and a guest. The police accused Richard Mungu of defacing President Museveni's election posters and charged him with malicious damage to property. The charges were later amended to aiding and abetting a crime, an apparent reference to the damaged posters. He was released on bail on 17 February.

On election day, the official Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) blocked access to Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp between 6am and 9.30am, citing an unspecified threat to national security. The Mobile Telecommunications Network (MTN), a leading provider of mobile phone and internet services in Uganda, said on its Twitter handle that the UCC had ordered it to disable all social media and mobile money-transferring services "due to a threat to public order and safety". Such actions violated the right to seek and receive information.

The Deputy Chief Justice stopped a peaceful demonstration organized by the FDC and Kizza Besigye planned for 5 May. His order followed an application by the Deputy Attorney General for interim orders to prevent FDC's "defiance campaign". The FDC's campaign sought, among other things, an international audit to review the presidential election results. However, the Court of Appeal ruled on 30 April that the campaign breached several articles of the Constitution.

On 14 September, 25 women were arrested and detained for four hours, before being released without charge, shortly before they were to present a petition to Parliament. The petition opposed proposed amendments to mandatory retirement ages for judicial officers and electoral commissioners set out in the Constitution. The Speaker of the Parliament rejected the bill and asked the government to table comprehensive constitutional amendments instead.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

On 28 November, at least 100 people were killed and 139 others arrested in clashes between security agencies and palace guards in the western town of Kasese, according to police.^[2] In some cases, security forces summarily shot people dead and then dumped the bodies on river banks and in bushes. The clashes followed attacks by the local king's guards on several police stations on 26 November, during which at least 14 police officers were killed. Charles Wesley Mumbere, King of the Rwenzururu kingdom, was arrested and transferred to the capital, Kampala, where he was charged with murder.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

On 14 March, the Non-Governmental Organisations Act (NGO Act) came into force. Some of its provisions were vaguely worded and could be used to clampdown on civil society organizations. For example, it restricted organizations from engaging in activities that are "prejudicial to the security, interests or dignity of the people of Uganda", without defining these terms.

Between April and May, offices of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), and the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) were broken into by unidentified people and items stolen. At FAWE, the intruders stole an internet server, computers, cameras and projectors. At HRNJ-Uganda, CCTV footage shows a visitor giving security guards food apparently containing sedatives, allowing four intruders to search the premises as the guards slept. The Inspector General of Police formed a committee in July to investigate the break-ins, but the affected organizations were concerned that investigations were not carried out. No one was arrested, charged or prosecuted in connection with the break-ins.^[3]

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

On 4 August, police broke up an LGBTI beauty pageant in Kampala, part of Uganda Pride. They arrested 16 people – most of them Ugandan LGBTI rights activists – who were released after about an hour. A man was seriously injured after he jumped from a sixth-floor window fearing police abuse.

On 24 September, the police prevented more than 100 people from joining a Pride parade on a beach in Entebbe. They ordered people back onto minibuses and told them to leave the area. The participants tried to go to another beach, but police prevented them from holding the parade there too.

The HRAPF and the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law (CSCHRCL), a coalition of 50 organizations, filed a petition in the East African Court of Justice, arguing that Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act was contrary to the rule of law and the good governance principles of the East African Community Treaty. On 27 September, the Court refused to consider the petition on the basis that the Anti-Homosexuality Act had been declared null and void by Uganda's Constitutional Court in August 2014.

CRIMES UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

The pre-trial hearing of former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) commander Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo, charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity in northern Uganda, began on 15 August in the International Crime Division of Uganda's High Court. The hearing was adjourned because Thomas Kwoyelo's lawyers were not notified in time. The prosecution also introduced new charges relating to sexual and gender-based violence. In September, a court in Gulu, northern Uganda, ruled that victims could participate in the proceedings in line with their right to participate before the International Criminal Court (ICC). Thomas Kwoyelo, who was captured by the Ugandan army in 2008, remained in detention.

On 23 March, the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber confirmed 70 charges against Dominic Ongwen, a former LRA commander who had been abducted as a child and forcibly recruited into the LRA. The charges included crimes against humanity and war crimes, sexual and gender-based crimes, and conscription and use of child soldiers in northern Uganda.

COUNTER-TERROR AND SECURITY

On 26 May, the High Court convicted seven of 13 people charged in relation to the 2010 World Cup bombing in Kampala. The Somali-based armed group al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for

the attack, which killed 76 people. The Court said the prosecution had failed to link five of the defendants to the bombing. The five were immediately rearrested and charged with new offences of creating documents and materials while in Luzira Prison connected with "preparations to facilitate, assist or engage co-conspirators to undertake terrorist acts in Uganda".

[1. Uganda: Violations against opposition party impeding its efforts to contest election outcome \(News story, 26 February\)](#)

[2. Uganda: Denounce unlawful killings and ensure accountability in aftermath of deadly clashes \(News story, 28 November\)](#)

[3. Uganda: Investigate break-ins at groups' offices \(News story, 13 June\)](#)

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