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World Report 2024



Uganda

Events of 2023

A Ugandan activist participates in a demonstration over proposed plans by Total Energies and the Ugandan government to build the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), in Kampala, Uganda September 15, 2023.

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The authorities made progress in addressing certain human rights abuses in 2023 but regressed in other areas. The Constitutional Court nullified repressive provisions of laws previously used by the authorities to restrict freedoms of expression and assembly, but security forces arrested protesters, journalists, and opposition supporters and leaders on trumped-up charges.

Uganda made strides toward addressing workplace sexual harassment but failed to hold perpetrators within the security forces accountable.

The government continued to place restrictions on civil society groups, particularly those working on human rights, while President Yoweri Museveni signed into law the regressive and abusive Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Freedoms of Expression and Assembly

In January, the Constitutional Court [nullified section 25 of the Computer Misuse Act](#), which penalizes “offensive communication.” In March, it [overturned sections 5 and 10 of the Public Order Management Act](#), which criminalize unauthorized public meetings and demonstrations.

On May 8, a court [dismissed charges](#) of inciting violence against former presidential candidate Kizza Besigye. Police had [arrested and charged Besigye in 2022](#) following demonstrations he led protesting the government's response to inflation.

Despite these court rulings, the authorities continued to threaten to arrest, or arrest, protesters, journalists, and those critical of the government.

On March 28, police in Kampala [arrested 11 activists](#) demonstrating against a corruption scandal involving government officials in Karamoja in eastern Uganda. On April 27, police [arrested 11 female opposition parliamentarians](#) protesting police brutality in Kampala.

During an event to mark World Press Freedom Day in Kampala on May 3, Minister for Information and Communications Technology and National Guidance Chris Baryomunsi [threatened people](#) whom he called "malicious Ugandans" who "spread false information and fake news on social media." A few days later, a joint operation of the police and military [arrested five local government officials](#) in the eastern district of Tororo for allegedly staging an unlawful demonstration about the poor status of roads in the area. On June 14, unidentified people [assaulted four reporters](#) covering local elections in Bukedea district.

On April 11, the police [announced the suspension](#) of officer Yeeko Ogwal for attacking two journalists who were covering a demonstration by medical interns in Kampala. In a statement, the police said Ogwal had been handed over to their Professional Standards Unit for further investigation.

On September 15, [police arrested at least four students](#) protesting the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) in front of Parliament building in Kampala. They were charged with the offence of "common nuisance," a broadly defined colonial-era offense that carries a punishment of imprisonment for one year. The students were released on bail five days later.

Attacks on Civil Society Groups

On February 6, the Foreign Affairs Ministry informed the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Uganda that it [would not renew its agreement to host the United Nations entity](#) beyond its three-year term ending in February 2023. The office [officially closed](#) on August 5.

On February 12, media reported on a leaked [draft report by the National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organizations](#) identifying 22 nongovernmental organizations accused of "promoting homosexuality" and "forced recruitment" of schoolchildren into homosexuality. The report recommended banning groups identified as "promoting LGBTIQ activities" and suggested individual activists should be publicly profiled to prevent them from any further civil society engagement.

Arrest and Harassment of Opposition Leaders and Supporters

On January 24, the authorities [charged 12 supporters](#) of the opposition party National Unity Platform (NUP) and [remanded](#) them to prison for organizing an "illegal assembly" in Jinja, east of Kampala. A few days later, the General Court Martial sitting in Makindye, Kampala, remanded to prison NUP supporter, [Anthony Agaba](#), also known as Bobi Young, on allegations of "spreading harmful propaganda." Agaba was [granted bail](#) in May.

On March 22, police [released NUP supporter Hamza Isma Mubiru](#), also known as Sadam Sadat, who was missing for a month after he was reportedly captured by unidentified armed personnel in the Makindye division of Kampala and charged with terrorism by the police. [Eleven other NUP](#)

supporters were arrested, charged with terrorism in June, and remanded to prison in Kampala pending their trial.

On September 13, police banned the NUP from holding meetings, alleging that the party's prior meetings had caused "public disorder" and were used to "incite violence and promote sectarianism."

Accountability for Security Force Abuses

On June 30, Uganda's High Court ordered Frank "Kaka" Bagyenda, the former director of the Internal Security Organization (ISO), and 14 ex-security personnel to compensate Musa Nsereko 275 million Ugandan shillings (about US\$74,000) for torturing and illegally detaining him for over a year without charge.

On June 13, prosecutors dropped charges against 218 civilians who were arrested when Uganda's military raided the palace of Charles Mumbere, the king of the Rwenzururu kingdom, in Kasese, western Uganda. During the November 2016 raid, the military killed over 100 people, including 15 children, but the government has failed to conduct an independent investigation into the use of force by the police and military.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

On May 26, President Museveni signed a bill into law criminalizing same-sex conduct. It also created the crime of "promotion of homosexuality," introduced the death penalty for several acts considered as "aggravated homosexuality," and increased the prison sentence for attempted same-sex conduct to 10 years. On August 18, prosecutors charged a 20-year-old man in Soroti with "aggravated homosexuality" for allegedly having sexual intercourse with a man with a disability.

Over the years, police have carried out mass arrests at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) pride events, LGBT-friendly bars, and at homeless shelters on spurious grounds, and they forced some detainees to undergo anal examinations, a form of cruel, degrading, and inhuman treatment that can, in some instances, constitute torture.

Women's Rights

On August 7, the government officially deposited for ratification the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention (C190). During negotiations for the convention in 2018 and 2019, Uganda played a key role as part of the African bloc. On May 25, Parliament passed the Employment (Amendment) Bill, which obligates employers to prevent sexual harassment, includes domestic workers in the labor law, and provides protections for casual workers. The bill is now before the president for approval.

Attacks on Students

On June 16, attackers believed to belong to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group attacked Mpondwe Lhubiriha Secondary School in the western district of Kasese, near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, killing at least 41 people, including 38 students in their dormitories. At time of writing, five students, believed by the authorities to have been abducted, remain missing. Since 2021, Uganda People's Defence Force troops have been deployed in eastern Congo as part of a joint operation with the Congolese army against the ADF.

Corruption

In April, police [arrested and charged](#) Karamoja Affairs Minister Mary Goretti Kitutu and other government officials for allegedly diverting metal roofing sheets meant for a relief program for impoverished communities in the eastern Karamoja sub-region. On April 14, the Anti-Corruption Court [granted bail](#) to Kitutu, and on June 29, it [committed Kitutu to trial](#).

Accountability for International Crimes

The 2022 request by the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor to conduct a hearing to confirm charges against Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony in his absence remains pending. Kony is the only living remaining ICC suspect of LRA crimes.

Uganda's International Crimes Division [continued its trial](#) against LRA commander Thomas Kwoyelo, which has dragged on for more than a decade. Kwoyelo has been in prison since he was captured by Ugandan forces in 2009.

Environment and Human Rights

A Human Rights Watch [report found](#) that the first stages of a planned oil development, including a pipeline operated and majority-owned by French fossil-fuel giant TotalEnergies, has caused food insecurity and household debt, caused children to leave school, and is likely to have devastating environmental effects.

Key International Actors

On March 24, the governments of Uganda and Rwanda [agreed](#) to enhance trade and cooperation during talks in Kigali, Rwanda. In 2022, Uganda and Rwanda [reopened their border](#) in Gatuna after relations between the two countries broke down in February 2019.

Following the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Parliament, on March 29, UN special rapporteurs and independent experts and Ugandan Parliamentary Working Groups raised "serious concerns about escalating risks to the human rights of LGBT persons in Uganda over the past 15 years."

On April 18, the European Union Parliament condemned the Anti-Homosexuality Bill and urged their External Action Service to "use all necessary diplomatic, legal and financial means to convince the president to not sign the law and establish an EU strategy for the universal decriminalization of homosexuality and transgender identity." In May, EU diplomatic chief Josep Borrell expressed regrets that the bill was signed into law.

On May 29, United States President Joseph Biden [released a public statement condemning the Anti-Homosexuality Act](#), characterizing the legislation as "a tragic violation of universal human rights" and calling for its immediate repeal. On August 8, the World Bank said that it will not consider new loans to Uganda after the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act.