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2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Uganda

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the year, the government enacted the Anti-Homosexuality Act, which expressly criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, proscribing the death penalty for “aggravated homosexuality” and life imprisonment for “homosexuality.”

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; inability of citizens to determine their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, workplace violence, child, early, and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, and other forms of such violence; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, which were enforced; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons.

The government did not take credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were several reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

Opposition activists, local media, and human rights activists reported security forces killed some individuals the government identified as dissidents and those it accused of criminal activity. In February, local media and opposition supporters reported security agencies detained and tortured National Unity Platform (NUP) supporter Coster Muhongya, age 70, leading to his death. According to media reports, on January 5, plainclothes security officers arrested Muhongya in Kasese district and detained him at Masaka police post and later at the Special Investigations Division in Kireka, “where he died during interrogation.” A police spokesperson told a press

conference Muhongya's death "resulted from a bathroom fall while in custody," adding police arrested Muhongya regarding his suspected involvement in recruiting members for the terrorist group ISIS-Democratic Republic of the Congo (ISIS-DRC, locally known as the Allied Democratic Forces).

B. DISAPPEARANCE

There were numerous reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities. Local media, opposition political parties, and human rights lawyers reported the military – particularly the Chieftaincy for Military Intelligence (CMI) and the Special Forces Command (SFC) – and police held individuals, often opposition supporters, at unidentified locations without charge. The opposition NUP party reported that while an unspecified number of its supporters were unaccounted for, security forces randomly detained its supporters without trial.

The NUP petitioned the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) with the names of 30 supporters the party's officials said were missing, some since 2019. On October 10, the UHRC reported its investigations revealed security agencies released from detention 12 of the 30 missing NUP supporters after charging them with various crimes, including murder.

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports security forces tortured and physically abused suspects, according to Amnesty International and other human rights activists. Impunity was rampant.

On February 13, NUP officials called a press conference and presented NUP supporter Eric Mwesigwa, who had burn marks on his chest, which he said were sustained during detention by the security services. According to Mwesigwa, a motorcycle taxi driver, on January 31, he was stopped and detained by unidentified security officers as he drove a client home. The security officers burned Mwesigwa "with hot metals" on his chest as they interrogated him concerning alleged NUP plans to overthrow the government. The security officers 10 days later dumped Mwesigwa, and a fellow motorcycle taxi driver found him and drove him to a health facility for medical treatment. On February 14, Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) spokesperson Brigadier Felix Kulayigye released a statement claiming none of the security agencies detained Mwesigwa. On March 1, at a UPDF press conference, Mwesigwa recanted his accusation and instead accused NUP officials of inflicting the burns to malign the security services, reportedly in exchange for a cash payment of 50 million Ugandan shillings (\$13,500). NUP president Robert Kyagulanyi stated on March 1, "this was an amateurish attempt by the UPDF to spin the unfortunate torture of a citizen by the army."

On July 11, media reported a foreign lawyer petitioned the International Criminal Court with testimony from 215 opposition supporters in the country who alleged torture at the hands of security agencies in the aftermath of the 2021 general election. The petition named President Yoweri Museveni, his son General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, Speaker of Parliament Anita Among, and 23 other officials as responsible for "aiding and abetting" human rights abuses. A government spokesperson told local media the torture allegations were "attention-seeking propaganda."

Human rights organizations reported police subjected lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons to forced anal exams. Impunity was a problem and was widespread within the police, military, prisons service, and executive branch. Security forces did not take adequate measures to investigate and punish officers implicated in human rights abuses, especially in incidents involving political opposition members.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in prisons and detention centers were harsh and, in some cases, life threatening due to gross overcrowding, inadequate sanitary conditions, physical abuse of detainees by security staff and fellow inmates, inadequate food, and understaffing.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Gross overcrowding was a problem in prisons, police cells, and unofficial detention facilities. The Uganda Prisons Service (UPS) reported in July prisons operated at 273 percent over capacity with “four inmates occupying the space allocated for one.” Members of the Human Rights Committee of parliament in March reported some inmates were forced to sleep in bathrooms due to overcrowding, which exposed inmates to disease. Legislators also reported overcrowding enabled the spread of sexual abuse among inmates. Former detainees reported prison prefects (inmates upon whom prison authorities bestowed a leadership position to supervise their fellow inmates) often beat their fellow inmates whom they accused of disobeying prison regulations.

Administration: Local human rights activists reported authorities did not always carry out investigations into credible allegations of mistreatment and only took administrative measures against errant officers if the abuses attracted negative publicity.

Independent Monitoring: Local human rights organizations reported the government permitted monitoring by independent nongovernmental observers. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported it visited 13 places of detention in accordance with its standard procedures. Findings from these visits on detainees’ treatment and living conditions were submitted to and discussed confidentially with authorities, including the military, police, and UPS.

Improvements: In April, the UPS reported it facilitated the training of 34 prisons officers in human rights law and supported the operations of human rights desks and committees in 259 prison stations.

D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION

Although the law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, security forces often arbitrarily arrested and detained persons, especially opposition supporters, activists, demonstrators, journalists, and LGBTQI+ persons. The law provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but this mechanism was seldom employed and rarely successful.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law required judges or prosecutors to issue a warrant before authorities made an arrest unless the arrest occurred during commission of a crime or while in pursuit of a perpetrator, but authorities often arrested suspects without warrants. The law required authorities to arraign suspects within 48 hours of arrest, but they frequently held suspects longer without charge. A Lawyers without Borders survey of 59 suspects in police custody without court arraignment reported approximately half were detained for three to nine days, and a third were incarcerated from 10 days to one month. Authorities were required to try suspects arrested for capital offenses within 360 days (120 days if charged with an offense triable by subordinate courts) or release them on bail. If prosecutors presented the case to a court within this time, however, there was no limit on further pretrial detention. While the law required authorities to inform detainees immediately of the reasons for detention, at times they did not do so.

The law provided for bail at the judge’s discretion, but many suspects were unaware of the law or lacked the financial means to pay bail fees. Judges generally granted requests for bail. Human rights organizations reported illiterate persons were disproportionately more likely to come into conflict with the law and be detained, which led to high rates of abuse of rights to bail and police bond due to a lack of awareness of the right and an inability to afford legal services. The law provided detainees the right to legal representation and access to a lawyer, but authorities did not always respect this right. The law required the government to provide an attorney for indigent

defendants charged with capital offenses, and the government adhered to this requirement. Most defendants endured significant delays through the judicial process before the conclusion of their cases. Security forces often held opposition political members and other suspects incommunicado.

Arbitrary Arrest: Arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention, particularly of dissidents, were problems. Police and military officials on numerous occasions arrested and harassed opposition supporters, especially those who posted videos on social media platforms such as TikTok that were critical of government officials. Local media and the NUP reported that on February 15, UPDF officers arrested NUP supporter Hamza Isma Mubiru, also known as Sadam Sadat, in Kampala and detained him in the Makindye military barracks and the police's Special Investigations Division for more than a month without an arraignment. On March 22, police released Mubiru after initiating an investigation into his alleged involvement in terrorism. A police spokesperson told local media the CMI was responsible for Mubiru's detention, but the CMI refused to comment on the issue.

Pretrial Detention: Case backlogs due to an inefficient judiciary, inadequate police investigations, absence of plea bargaining prior to 2015, insufficient use of bail, and absence of a time limit for the detention of detainees awaiting trial contributed to frequent prolonged pretrial detentions. There was not sufficient information available to determine if pretrial detentions frequently equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

The constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, but the government did not always respect judicial independence and impartiality. Corruption, understaffing, inefficiency, and executive-branch interference with judicial rulings often undermined the courts' independence. Human rights activists, lawyers, judicial officers, and local media reported that on many occasions, security agencies defied court orders to release detainees or arraign persons they detained without charge, and they reported security agents intimidated judicial officers from offering bail to political detainees. Activists also reported that due to a lack of judicial independence, the judiciary unnecessarily delayed human rights petitions by denying hearing dates or prolonging hearing sessions.

Judicial corruption was a problem, and local media reported numerous cases where judicial officers in lower courts solicited and accepted bribes from the parties involved.

Trial Procedures

The law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, but the government did not always enforce this right. Although the law provided for a presumption of innocence, authorities did not always respect this right. An inadequate system of judicial administration resulted in a serious backlog of cases, undermining suspects' right to a timely trial. All nonmilitary trials were public. The law allowed military courts to try civilians who assisted members of the military in committing offenses or were found possessing arms, ammunition, or other equipment reserved for the armed forces. Military courts prosecuted NUP supporters wearing red berets, a clothing item common to both NUP and the military. Civilians charged in military courts were often denied the right to a public trial, to communicate with an attorney of their choice, and to file an appeal in the civilian court system.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Authorities detained numerous opposition politicians and activists on politically motivated grounds. Authorities released many without charge but charged others in military courts with crimes such as illegal possession of firearms, spreading harmful propaganda, "offensive communication," and inciting violence. According to human rights lawyers, military courts were less independent than their civilian counterparts and allowed authorities to hold detainees indefinitely. Human rights

lawyers reported police and military detention facilities sometimes denied political detainees access to and communication with their attorneys. No reliable statistics on the total number of political detainees or prisoners were available. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the UHRC reported authorities provided access to places of detention upon request.

NUP officials reported security agencies arrested and sometimes detained without trial party supporters who posted social media content critical of government officials. In January, NUP officials reported unidentified security officers arrested NUP supporter Anthony Agaba, also known as Bobi Young, outside Kampala, after he posted videos mocking Speaker of Parliament Anita Among. Agaba remained in detention until January 30, when UPDF officers arraigned him alongside two military officers in a military court in Kampala and charged him with spreading harmful propaganda. The accused officers pled guilty and received a nine-month prison sentence each. Agaba instead pled not guilty, and the court remanded him to prison until May 9, when it released him on bail. Authorities held more than 30 NUP supporters arrested in December 2020 in the run-up to the January 2021 election on charges of illegal possession of firearms. On April 4, a military prosecutor added an extra charge of treachery. On February 13, the court released on bail two NUP members of parliament, Muhammad Ssegirinya and Allan Ssewanyana, who were in detention 524 days on murder and terrorism charges, which they denied.

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Not applicable.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

Human rights organizations reported government and private sector players provided inadequate compensation to families affected by evictions to make way for the East African Crude Oil Pipeline. Human Rights Watch reported in June some affected families spoke of receiving pressure and intimidation from private companies and government officials to accept financial compensation that would be “inadequate to buy replacement land.” A spokesperson for the government’s petroleum regulator dismissed the reports and stated the oil companies building the pipeline abided by local, national, and international standards.

H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

The constitution and law prohibited such actions, but there were reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions. Government authorities reportedly entered homes without judicial or other appropriate authorization; accessed, collected, or used private communications or personal data arbitrarily or without appropriate legal authority; implemented regulations and practices that allowed for arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, including use of technology arbitrarily or unlawfully to surveil or interfere with the privacy of individuals; used technologies and practices including internet and social media controls, blocking or filtering of websites and social media platforms, sensors, biometric data collection, and data analytics; and punished family members for offenses allegedly committed by relatives. The law authorized government security agencies to tap private conversations to combat terrorism-related offenses. The government invoked the law to monitor telephone and internet communications.

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government often restricted this right.

Freedom of Expression: The government restricted citizens' ability to criticize its actions and officials or to discuss some matters of public interest. The law made it illegal to "write, send, or share any information through a computer, which is likely to ridicule, degrade, or demean another person, group of persons, a tribe, an ethnicity, a religion or gender." Authorities used this law to intimidate internet users from criticizing government policies. NUP officials reported security agents tracked, intimidated, and arrested its supporters for posting videos on the internet critical of government officials and policies. Security officials arrested and charged NUP supporter Anthony Agaba with spreading harmful propaganda after he shared online videos critical of government officials. Several activists and journalists reported receiving death threats after participating in online campaigns on X (formerly Twitter) highlighting the poor state of road infrastructure and health services. The minister for information and communications technology warned social media users to desist from participating in the campaign or they would be arrested for breaching internet communication laws. Dissident author Kakwenza Rukirabashaija reported government officials blocked the importation and sale of his book *The Savage Avenger*, which was critical of President Museveni's son, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba.

Violence and Harassment: Security forces subjected journalists and media houses to violence, harassment, and intimidation. Local media and media freedom activists reported numerous incidents of security officials, local government officials, and private individuals with connections to government officials assaulting journalists in the course of their work. Civil society organization Human Rights Network for Journalists Uganda also reported several incidents of police officers detaining journalists on the orders of government officials as punishment for unfavorable news coverage. On October 5, SFC officers arrested 14 journalists as they covered NUP President Kyagulanyi's return to the country from a foreign trip. According to media freedom activists, SFC officers beat the journalists and confiscated their equipment, before releasing them later that day. A police statement noted police would investigate reports of assault on the journalists. On March 5, police arrested journalist Andrew Arinaitwe at a high school outside Kampala on suspicion of criminal trespass as he researched a sexual abuse story. On March 9, police arraigned Arinaitwe and charged him with criminal trespass. The court granted bail to Arinaitwe on March 15 and dismissed the charges against him on August 15.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Journalists, opposition politicians, and human rights activists reported authorities wielded control over editorial decisions at public broadcasters and at some private media outlets as well. The government penalized those who published items counter to its guidelines and directly and indirectly censored media, including by controlling licensing and advertising and instructing editors to suspend critical journalists. Press freedom activists reported the government used advertising to control editorial coverage of private media organizations. On July 18, President Museveni instructed all government advertising be issued to the public broadcaster and other government media to enable them to meet operational costs, but he rescinded the directive on August 10 after advocacy from private media owners.

Government officials and ruling party members owned many of the private rural radio stations and imposed reporting restrictions. Media practitioners stated government and security agents occasionally called editors and instructed them to refrain from publishing stories portraying the government negatively, hosting critical commentators on radio and television talk shows, and discussing some political matters. The police's Media and Political Crimes Unit and communications regulator Uganda Communications Commission closely monitored all radio, television, and print media. The government maintained a 2021 ban of Facebook stemming from the company's suspension of accounts linked to government officials for "inauthentic behavior." Journalists, facing government pressure, practiced self-censorship.

Nongovernmental Impact: On July 21, media reported unidentified vigilante youth ran out of the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) secretariat in Kampala and assaulted journalists covering party proceedings at the secretariat, injuring several. Party President Patrick Amuriat announced an “in-depth investigation.”

Internet Freedom

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet by: censoring online content, monitoring internet communications without appropriate legal authority, blocking access, pressuring internet platforms and technology companies to restrict content, charging individuals with crimes punishable by civil fines or criminal punishments, prohibiting online anonymity for some individuals, disrupting communications prior to elections or planned demonstrations, and using bots or trolls to manipulate social media discourse.

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. Government failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters led to de facto restrictions on freedom of assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution provided for freedom of assembly, but the government did not respect this right. The government blocked and disrupted public meetings and peaceful protests by the opposition, as well as trade unionists.

On April 21, police officers used sticks, batons, and teargas to beat and disperse NUP officials and their supporters who gathered in Buvuma district to mark International Women’s Day. Local media reported NUP Member of Parliament for Buvuma District Suzan Nakaziba Mugabi was hospitalized after sustaining injuries. Police claimed in a statement that officers responded to an unlawful assembly and only arrested the politicians and their supporters after they turned violent. On April 24, police announced the suspension of 11 officers in Buvuma District pending investigation into “excessive use of force...and the alleged beating and torture of Buvuma Woman [parliamentarian] and some of her supporters.” On April 27, police arrested 11 NUP women parliamentarians who held a demonstration in Kampala to protest police brutality. Police released them the same day without charge.

Freedom of Association

While the constitution and law provided for freedom of association, the government did not respect this right. The government restricted the operations of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), especially those working on civil and political rights, including human rights of LGBTQI+ persons, and LGBTQI+ activists reported the government did not fully investigate attacks on LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations. The government also revoked the operational mandate for international organizations working on human rights matters (see section 5). Government regulations required NGOs to disclose sources of funding and personal information regarding employees and imposed onerous registration and reporting requirements.

The regulations enabled the National Bureau for Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO Bureau), a government agency that formally registered organizations, and its local-level structures to deny registration to any organization focused on topics deemed “undesirable” or “prejudicial” to the “dignity of the people of Uganda.” The regulations also provided the NGO Bureau broad powers to inspect NGO offices and records and to suspend NGO activities without due process. The NGO Bureau imposed registration, permit renewal, and administrative fees, which local NGOs declared

exorbitant. NGOs working on civil and political rights reported the NGO Bureau and police officials carried out numerous impromptu inspections of their offices, intimidating staff and threatening to close the premises, sometimes without cause. LGBTQI+ organizations reported frequent harassment by security officials and NGO Bureau officials.

The government also restricted the operations of opposition political parties (see section 3, Elections and Political Participation).

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. Most refugees enjoyed access to asylum; relative freedom of movement; freedom of residence; the right to registration and documentation; and access to justice, education, health care, and employment.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees. Individuals fleeing South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (if the Congolese were from eastern DRC) who entered the country through a designated border post had *prima facie* refugee status (status without requiring individual determination of refugee status). The local Refugee Eligibility Committee, however, determined whether individuals fleeing from Rwanda, Somalia, Burundi, or other countries, as well as South Sudanese and Congolese refugees who entered through nondesignated border points, were eligible for refugee status. The committee was functional, but administrative matters and the influx of asylum seekers caused backlogs, despite efforts by UNHCR and the government to expedite the process.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Some refugees reported government officials demanded bribes from refugees to process or issue paperwork, including for refugees to acquire land or food benefits.

Durable Solutions: The government did not accept third-country refugees for resettlement, but it assisted in the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their homes and supported the resettlement of third-country refugees to other countries by providing birth certificates and travel documents. A 2015 Constitutional Court ruling confirmed certain long-term refugees had the right to apply to naturalize, and in 2016 the government committed to begin processing naturalization cases for an estimated 15,000 refugees who had resided in the country for approximately 20 years. The law provided restrictions to any such application, stating, "notwithstanding any provision of this Act or any other law, any period of residence in Uganda under the authority of any ... convention travel document shall not be taken into account in computing the time of residence in Uganda for purposes of acquisition of citizenship by registration or naturalization." The law defined "convention travel document" as a travel document issued to a refugee under the relevant refugee instruments and laws. There were no known cases of any refugee completing naturalization.

Section 3.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The law, however, also allowed authorities to carry out elections for local government officials by having voters line up behind their preferred candidate or the candidate's representative, portrait, or symbol.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections were widely reported not to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities.

The government held several parliamentary and local government by-elections, which media, opposition parties, and observers reported featured voter harassment, violence, and intimidation by the security forces, as well as ballot stuffing; President Museveni acknowledged some of these allegations. In June, the government held a local government by-election in Bukedea District. Independent candidate David Stephen Omagor told local media that on June 5, unidentified individuals dressed in police uniforms broke into his house, and on June 6, when Omagor arrived at the Electoral Commission offices for nomination, a group of unidentified youth assaulted and beat him. During the incidents, Omagor claims the individuals took his medication, 163 million Ugandan shillings (\$43,900) meant for electoral campaign expenses, and his nomination documents, leading him to miss the nomination. On polling day June 14, local media reported FDC representatives complained security and polling officials allowed ruling party officials to stuff ballots premarked in favor of their favorite candidate into ballot boxes. Local media also reported police officers beat two journalists and confiscated their equipment as the journalists covered the distribution of polling materials. On June 26, President Museveni wrote to the Anti-Corruption Unit instructing officials to investigate acts of electoral malpractice in the by-election. In July, police arrested nine police and local government officers and charged them in court with a combination of robbery and assault charges. On July 26, the court granted bail to four of the suspects.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Opposition parties reported security agencies used a provision of the law meant for regulating public meetings to restrict their operations. The NUP and FDC reported police officers restricted some of their officials from holding public events and blocked some party officials from participating in electoral processes. On August 5, police entered a hotel in Kyenjojo town in the western part of the country and disrupted a mobilization meeting held by NUP officials with party supporters, asserting the meeting was an unlawful assembly and accusing organizers of inciting violence. Police arrested five NUP officials and injured two in the process. Police released the NUP officials the same day without charge.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: Cultural factors, high costs, and sexual harassment limited women's ability to run for political office. Women activists reported the official fees required to secure a nomination to run for elected office were prohibitively high and prevented most women from running for election. Human rights activists also reported many women were locked out of political positions because they lacked minimum education qualifications for the positions, having been denied the right to education earlier in life. Activists reported members of security agencies committed violence and harassment, which discouraged women from voting. Women activists reported sexual harassment in political spaces discouraged women from participating in politics. Activists reported the number of women legislators holding open seats dwindled because of the affirmative action policy, which reserved a legislative position for women in each district. They also reported internal political party processes locked women out of contesting for open seats, limiting them to affirmative action seats, and media coverage mocked and trivialized women candidates. Activists also reported persons with a disability were discouraged from seeking electoral office because by law they would be required to show proof they were of sound mind.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials; however, civil society organizations stated the government did not implement the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

Corruption: Officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, especially through inflation of public procurement costs, bribery, kickbacks, and diversion of public resources to private use, while many corruption cases remained pending for years. On February 13, local media reported the Anti-Corruption Unit in the Office of the President arrested three family members of Minister for Karamoja Affairs Mary Goretti Kitutu after they were found selling government relief items including roofing materials known as “iron sheets,” which were intended for some of the country’s poorest communities in Karamoja, in the northern part of the country. Local media subsequently reported Kitutu’s office diverted almost half of the iron sheets to other ministers for their personal use. On March 15, local media reported President Museveni instructed the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to have the implicated officials prosecuted. In April, the public prosecutor charged Ministers Kitutu, Lugolobi, and Nandutu with corruption and the court remanded them to prison, before releasing them on bail. The ministers’ trials continued at year’s end. On March 28, police arrested 11 anti-corruption activists when they held a demonstration demanding prosecution of the ministers. Prosecutors charged the 11 activists with inciting violence and the court remanded them to prison until it released them on bail on May 5. Their trial continued at year’s end.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State’s *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State’s *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5.

Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups operated under government restrictions, and government officials sometimes declined to cooperate with these groups. Local NGOs advocating for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons faced restrictions and lack of cooperation by the government.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: Human rights defenders (HRDs) reported receiving numerous threats of arrest and death threats from security officials for their work. Some HRDs reported a certain number of human rights organizations temporarily sent HRDs out of the country for their safety after receiving threats. HRDs working in the environment space, especially those involved in advocacy against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline, reported some HRDs quit their jobs in fear of attack from security officers. LGBTQI+ activists reported HRDs working with sexual minorities were at a high risk of harassment from both security officials and private individuals.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government did not cooperate with some UN specialized agencies that monitored human rights. On February 3, the government notified the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) it would not renew the OHCHR’s mandate in the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated the government had built sufficient human rights monitoring mechanisms, rendering the OHCHR office unnecessary. Media and human rights activists alleged the government’s decision was in retaliation for the OHCHR’s

criticism of the country's human rights record, especially in relation to reports of extrajudicial killings in the run-up to the 2021 election. The OHCHR closed its local office on August 5.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The UHRC was a constitutionally mandated institution with quasi-judicial powers authorized to investigate allegations of human rights abuses, direct the release of detainees, and award compensation to abuse victims. The president appointed its board, consisting of a chairperson and five commissioners.

The UHRC pursued suspected human rights abusers, including accused members of the military and police forces. It visited and inspected places of detention and held private conferences with detainees on their conditions in custody. It investigated reports of human rights abuses, reported its annual findings to parliament, and recommended measures to improve the executive branch's respect of human rights. The government did not always implement UHRC recommendations during the year. The UHRC released its annual report on May 25, but human rights activists criticized the report for ignoring abuse of civil and political rights and rights of the LGBTQI+ community.

Section 6.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape of women, which was punishable by life imprisonment or death, but did not address spousal rape. During the year, the government enacted a law that expressly criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, proscribing the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality," which included men raping other men. The government also used a law prohibiting "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature" to prosecute men accused of raping men. The law did not address so-called corrective rape of LGBTQI+ persons. The law also criminalized domestic violence and provided up to two years' imprisonment upon conviction.

Rape and domestic violence were common problems throughout the country, and the government did not effectively enforce the law. Local media and women rights activists reported numerous incidents of rape, sometimes involving kidnapping and killings of women, but authorities were often unable to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable. Local media reported perpetrators of rape included persons in positions of authority such as religious leaders, local government officials, police and military officers, health-care workers, and academic staff. Women's rights activists reported some police officers sexually abused individuals in commercial sex whom they arrested as a precondition for their release. According to local media and human rights activists, many rape survivors lacked faith in government institutions to bring their abusers to justice and declined to report the crime, while others remained silent to avoid stigmatization.

Human rights activists and local media reported that even when women reported cases of rape to police, officers blamed the women for causing the rape by dressing indecently, took bribes from the alleged perpetrators to stop the investigation, pressured survivors into withdrawing the cases, or simply dismissed the accusations and refused to record them. Women's rights activists reported survivors also declined to report cases or participate in investigations because the process of collecting evidence was intrusive and dehumanizing. Disability rights activists reported women with disabilities, especially blind women, women with mental disabilities, and women living with albinism, were at a disproportionately higher risk for rape and other forms of gender-based violence. Freedom and Roam Uganda reported lesbians and transgender women suffered gender-based violence and "corrective rape" in reported attempts to change their sexuality.

On August 3, local media reported police initiated investigations into allegations a senior police officer within the Directorate of Crime Intelligence, Gilbert Bwana Arinaitwe, raped a woman domestic worker, age 23, in his household after threatening her with a firearm. According to local media, the domestic worker stated Arinaitwe raped her on several occasions starting July 25, and warned her against reporting the crime to authorities. On August 11, the public prosecutor charged Arinaitwe with trafficking in persons. Court officials remanded Arinaitwe to prison and granted him bail on August 18. The judiciary held special gender-based violence court sessions, which reduced case backlog and helped the judiciary improve conviction rates.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law prohibited FGM/C and established a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment for convicted perpetrators or life imprisonment if the victim died. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Local media and government officials reported the practice was common among some communities along the eastern border with Kenya. Women's rights activists reported in July some elders within the Karamojong community smuggled girls younger than 18 into Kenya to undergo FGM because they believed Kenyan authorities were less diligent in enforcing anti-FGM measures. Activists also reported some traditional birth attendants within the Karamoja region forced pregnant women seeking services to undergo FGM before attending to them. Women's rights activists reported some community elders in the eastern part of the country waited until teenage girls returned home during school holidays and then subjected them to FGM/C, when there was little scrutiny from school officials. Civil society organizations also reported community elders, predominantly women, who conducted FGM/C procedures, continued the practice because they did not have alternative livelihoods to replace the 15,000-to-30,000 Ugandan shillings (\$4 to \$8) paid for each procedure.

Women's rights activists reported they built informant networks with local government leaders who shared information on FGM practices and practitioners. Activists then used the information to report cases to police. Activists noted, however, that some police officers opted to warn FGM practitioners instead of arresting them. A police officer told local media in January that police failed to act against FGM perpetrators because the officers were unable to secure the requisite evidence that could lead to a conviction. Police reported officers carried out community sensitization efforts to encourage behavior change. Civil society organizations reported they worked with the government to identify and relocate girls at risk of FGM/C to shelters.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: The law criminalized sexual harassment, but authorities did not effectively enforce the law. Women's rights activists reported sexual harassment was a widespread problem in homes, schools, universities, workplaces, public transport, public spaces, media, and the music and entertainment industry. Women members of parliament reported sexual harassment was so prevalent within the legislature it discouraged women from participating in politics. Women's rights activists reported low-ranking women officials lacked adequate institutional tools for reporting sexual harassment in the workplace and stigma associated with reporting sexual harassment abuses prevented many survivors from speaking out.

Local media, police, and women's rights activists reported violence against widows was prevalent. Police officers in Wakiso District reported in June police stations were sometimes overwhelmed by the number of widows seeking shelter after their deceased husband's families evicted them from the matrimonial property.

Discrimination: The law provided women the same legal status and rights as men, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Women's rights activists reported numerous cases of discrimination against women, including in divorce, employment, education, and owning or managing businesses and properties. Many customary laws discriminated against women in adoption, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Women's rights activists reported as discriminatory a November 2022 court ruling that wives were not entitled to 50 percent of matrimonial property, as well as a March 2 court ruling that found an evangelical church could lawfully require only women to seek parental consent before marriage, not men. Customary laws in many areas stipulated widowed women could not own or inherit property or retain custody of their children. Human rights activists reported lesbians, transgender, and queer women were at a higher risk of discrimination at

public health facilities. Traditional divorce law in many areas required women to meet stricter evidentiary standards than men to prove adultery. In some ethnic groups, men could “inherit” the widows of their deceased brothers. The law did not recognize cohabiting relationships, and women involved in such relationships had no judicial recourse to protect their rights. Women faced discrimination in employment and hiring, as well as broad economic discrimination.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Disability rights activists reported that although persons with disabilities had the right to access reproductive services, the absence of health workers with the ability to communicate with blind and deaf patients meant many persons with disabilities did not receive sufficient information regarding reproductive health services. Activists reported government sexual and reproductive health programs did not provide for adequate outreach to women with disabilities, leaving many in rural and remote areas without access to the services. According to activists, public health institutions did not cater to persons with disabilities when making official communication, for example, by using braille technology. Human rights activists also reported many women with disabilities depended on close family members for access to sexual and reproductive health services limiting their ability to make free choices regarding their sexual health and limiting their right to privacy. Activists reported some public health workers declined to attend to pregnant women with disabilities unless they employed a personal caretaker.

LGBTQI+ activists reported LGBTQI+ persons were able to provide informed consent before receiving reproductive health treatment, although many lesbians and bisexual and queer women preferred to access sexual and reproductive health services at LGBTQI+ drop-in centers as they found public health facilities did not cater to their needs. The activists reported some public health officials declined to provide health care, including reproductive health services, to LGBTQI+ persons.

Human rights activists and government officials reported cultural practices in some remote areas impeded access to sexual and reproductive health services for women. Women’s rights activists reported some public hospitals required women to secure their partner’s consent before accessing some sexual and reproductive health services. Public health workers provided insufficient information regarding the side effects of contraceptives, which inadvertently discouraged some women from seeking sexual and reproductive health services after experiencing severe side effects. Some men in rural and remote areas refused to use contraception and in turn also prohibited their partners from accessing sexual and reproductive health services.

Activists also reported some religious organizations actively campaigned against women seeking sexual and reproductive health services, and cultural practices that placed a higher premium on women who bore more children prevented some women from accessing sexual and reproductive health services. Human rights activists reported many public health service providers declined to provide sexual and reproductive health services to teenagers, particularly those age 17 and younger, because the age of consent was 18. This practice led to many cases of teenage pregnancies and a rise in HIV infection among teenage girls.

Human rights activists reported Family and Child Protection Units at police stations provided postexposure prophylaxis for rape survivors but often referred survivors to shelters for emergency contraception.

Maternal mortality was 189 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) *2022 Demographics and Health Survey*. Media and activists attributed the high rate to an inability of pregnant women to access skilled medical care due to limited funding of public health facilities, which led to understaffing, drug shortages, power outages, a preference for traditional birth attendants over skilled medical workers, and unsafe abortions. According to the WHO, adolescent birth rates were high at 111 per 1,000 girls for the period 2011 to 2020, the most recent period for which data was available. According to human rights activists and the WHO, the

elevated adolescent pregnancy rate was caused by statutory rape, child sexual exploitation, a high rate of school dropouts, and limited knowledge of contraception among teenagers.

There were social and cultural barriers related to menstruation and access to menstruation hygiene that impacted girls' ability to participate equally in society, including many limits on girls' access to education. Many girls in school suffered stigmatization and bullying due to the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, causing higher instances of dropping out. Local media and child rights activists reported girls who became pregnant while in school almost always dropped out. According to child rights activists, for girls in school, the government required mandatory maternity leave at three months of a pregnancy until six months after delivery, but women's rights activists reported schools owned by religious organizations declined to readmit the girls at all. The government policy required the boy responsible for the pregnancy to simultaneously drop out of school until the girl returned. Human rights activists reported teenage mothers who returned to school after giving birth quickly dropped out due to stigma and because schools lacked capacity to cater to the needs of lactating mothers.

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

The law prohibited discrimination and violence based on race, ethnicity, religion, origin, social or economic standing, and political opinion, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. The government operated an Equal Opportunities Commission with a mandate to promote equal and fair access to opportunities without discrimination.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Some Indigenous minorities accused the government of marginalization that excluded them from participating in decisions affecting their livelihood. Human rights activists reported the government did not grant official recognition to several Indigenous communities, which led to political exclusion, limited access to social services, and limited access to livelihood resources. The activists reported members of some Indigenous communities took up other ethnic identities while submitting official documentation because their original documents were not officially recognized. Human rights activists reported the government only partially compensated and resettled Batwa and Benet communities whom it evicted from their ancestral lands to create wildlife protection areas in the eastern and southwestern parts of the country. The government did not issue land titles to members of the Batwa and Benet communities it resettled, thus restricting their access to land for livelihood. Local media reported the government made attempts to resettle the Batwa community on arable farmland, which did not accommodate the community's hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

CHILDREN

Education: Local media and civil society organizations reported that child, early, and forced marriages and teenage pregnancy led to a higher rate of school dropouts for girls than for boys. Some schools – particularly those managed by religious institutions – did not allow pregnant girls to return to school. While primary school enrollment was high, according to the latest government statistics, only 27 percent of secondary school age children were enrolled in school.

Human rights activists reported children from the Benet and Batuku Indigenous communities were forced by local education authorities to undertake school instruction in the languages spoken by their larger neighboring ethnic groups, a practice they believed threatened their culture.

Child Abuse: The law prohibited numerous forms of child abuse and provided for fines, five years' imprisonment, or both for persons convicted of abusing children's rights. Victims' parents, however, often opted to settle cases out of court for a cash or in-kind payment. Corporal punishment of children was prohibited by the law; however, corporal punishment of children was

widespread. Despite the law, a pattern of child abuse existed in sexual assault, physical abuse, ritual killings, early marriage, FGM/C, child trafficking, infanticide, and child labor, among other abuses. Police reported responding to numerous reports of violence against children by persons in authority, such as teachers in school and guardians in domestic settings. On July 2, local media reported police arrested a man after he reportedly burned his son with heated cooking oil as a form of punishment for an alleged misdeed. The prosecutor charged the man with aggravated torture.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage was 18, but authorities generally did not enforce this law. Child marriages were prevalent. Local media, human rights activists, political leaders, and police reported some rural and remote communities in the country forced girls younger than 18 into marriage. Officials noted some parents married off girls they could not financially support in return for payments. Children's rights activists reported some parents forced child survivors of statutory rape to marry their abusers if the child got pregnant. Officials from local government and police partnered with cultural institutions and civil society organizations to carry out community sensitization campaigns in rural areas to speak out against the practice.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibited the sale, grooming, or use of children for commercial sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking. It set the minimum age for consensual sex at 18. The law defined "statutory rape" as any sexual contact outside marriage with a child younger than 18 regardless of consent or age of the perpetrator. The government did not enforce the law effectively, however, and violations were pervasive. Local media reported numerous cases where abusers recruited children from rural areas into commercial sexual exploitation under the guise of providing them legitimate employment opportunities.

Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: The law criminalized infanticide, including of children with disabilities, and authorities sporadically enforced the law. Local media and LGBTQI+ activists reported intersex children were at high risk of infanticide and some parents of children with disabilities abandoned them in the bush or threw them in pit latrines and left them to die. Police reported an increase in infanticide cases.

ANTISEMITISM

The Jewish population numbered approximately 2,000 members centered in Mbale District in the eastern part of the country. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

FORCED ORGAN HARVESTING

Police, local media, and activists reported organized criminal groups carried out organ harvesting, and some workers who signed up with labor recruitment companies to work in Middle East and Gulf countries had their organs, especially kidneys and livers, harvested.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Criminalization: Consensual same-sex sexual conduct was illegal according to a colonial-era law that criminalized "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature." Penalties for same-

sex sexual conduct (and a multitude of nonsexual activities) were stiffened by the passage and enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) in May, which prescribed the death penalty for serial offenders and life imprisonment for adult first-time offenders (three years for minor offenders). The law also criminalized “promotion of homosexuality,” required persons to report individuals they suspected of engaging in same-sex relations, and prohibited landlords and property managers from knowingly renting to persons who violated the act. LGBTQI+ activists petitioned the Constitutional Court to nullify the AHA. The Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecution issued a circular to prosecutors instructing them to secure clearance from headquarters before initiating any prosecutions under the AHA; some provisions of the law were enforced.

LGBTQI+ activists reported police arrested numerous individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity and subjected many to forced anal exams, a medically discredited practice with no evidentiary value that was considered a form of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and could amount to torture. LGBTQI+ activists under the umbrella association Convening for Equality reported 18 instances of forced anal exams by police between January and August. On August 23, the prosecutor charged a spa manager in Njeru Magistrate’s Court with homosexuality, promotion of homosexuality, and knowingly allowing her premises to be used for homosexuality, with potential sentences of life in prison, 20 years in prison, and seven years in prison, respectively. Police arrested the accused after complaints from the spa’s neighbors, who reported the accused featured her workers in same-sex pornography video shoots. On August 22, prosecutors charged Elisha Mukisa, a prominent “ex-gay” activist, and his partner with homosexuality in breach of the AHA. The prosecution stated Mukisa lured his partner into same-sex relations and offered him accommodation in a government-sponsored apartment. Police detained the men and conducted anal exams on both. The court remanded the two to prison.

Violence and Harassment: Human rights activists reported numerous instances of state and nonstate actor violence and harassment against LGBTQI+ persons and noted authorities did not adequately investigate the cases. The Strategic Response Team, a coalition of NGOs, reported 306 abuses against LGBTQI+ persons between January and August, with 25 of those abuses conducted by state actors. The Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) reported in April a mob in Kampala kidnapped a transgender woman and stripped her naked. The mob forced her to walk through the streets as it hurled projectiles at her and recorded videos. Police arrested her, and the prosecutor charged her with being a public nuisance before court officials released her on bail; the government took no action against the perpetrators in this case. The HRAPF reported that in a limited number of cases police acted against those complicit in violence against LGBTQI+ persons. The HRAPF reported in June police in Kampala arrested an unidentified man after he assaulted a transgender woman.

Discrimination: The law prohibited discrimination based on sex, among other categories, but did not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. Provisions of the AHA discriminated against LGBTQI+ persons, for example by prohibiting landlord or property managers from knowingly renting to persons who might commit violations of the act and requiring all persons, including medical personnel, to report LGBTQI+ persons who might commit violations of the act. The law did not recognize LGBTQI+ individuals, couples, or their families. LGBTQI+ activists reported LGBTQI+ persons suffered stigma and faced discrimination in access to health care, employment, housing, and other social services, and families disowned LGBTQI+ persons and expelled them from households, which left many homeless and led others to conceal their sexual orientation.

LGBTQI+ activists reported a sharp rise in evictions of LGBTQI+ persons with the introduction of the AHA draft bill. The HRAPF and the Uganda Key Populations Consortium reported responding to 424 cases of eviction and the need for relocation by September. The HRAPF also reported LGBTQI+ persons were increasingly outed after enactment of the AHA and some were dismissed from their jobs by their employers. In June, the HRAPF reported unidentified individuals outed a lesbian by pinning a written notice to her door and sending one to her employer; she was immediately fired and forced to seek alternative accommodation after her neighbors threatened her.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Legal gender recognition was not available, and the law did not provide the option of identifying as “nonbinary/intersex/gender nonconforming.” Transgender persons could officially change their names, but the law did not provide an option for changing gender markers on official documents.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: LGBTQI+ activists reported LGBTQI+ persons endured intense social pressure to change their sexual orientation. The AHA provided for courts to order persons convicted under its provisions to undergo “rehabilitation,” although the government did not enforce this provision. Activists reported some families compelled LGBTQI+ children to undergo talk therapy sessions with religious leaders intended to change sexual orientation, compelled LGBTQI+ children to “denounce” their sexual orientation and gender identity in religious gatherings, or compelled their LGBTQI+ children into forced marriages in an attempt to change their sexual orientation. LGBTQI+ activists reported some public health workers attempted to compel LGBTQI+ persons to change their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression before providing health services. The Ministry of Health released two circulars instructing public health workers “not to deny services to any client who presents themselves for services,” and “not to discriminate or stigmatize any individual who seeks healthcare for any reason – gender, religion, tribe, economic or social status or sexual orientation.” Some government officials openly encouraged attempts to change the sexual orientation of LGBTQI+ persons.

There were no reports of surgeries performed on nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The government restricted LGBTQI+ organizations’ ability to legally register and operate. The AHA prohibited operation “of an organization which promotes or encourages homosexuality or the observance or normalization” of the same. Prior to the AHA, authorities used provisions of the law to restrict or deny the registration of LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations due to allegations the proposed names of the organizations were “undesirable” and their activities unlawful. The NGO Bureau maintained its 2022 suspension of NGO Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), citing SMUG’s failure to incorporate at the Uganda Registration Services Bureau and to register with the NGO Bureau, despite the courts’ longstanding failure to address SMUG’s appeal of those two bodies’ refusals to incorporate or to register the nonprofit organization. LGBTQI+ activists reported police often failed to investigate attacks on LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations and in September unknown individuals attacked the premises of Trans Network Uganda, set it on fire, and stole official documents. Police told LGBTQI+ activists it was investigating the incident. LGBTQI+ activists reported the NGO Bureau carried out a disproportionately higher volume of inspections on offices of LGBTQI+ organizations, during which some NGO Bureau staff threatened to shut down the organizations.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The law criminalized discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities, but persons with disabilities could not access education and health services on an equal basis with others. The law provided for access on an equal basis to education, employment, health services, information, communications, buildings, transportation, and the judicial system for persons with disabilities, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. According to disability rights activists, persons with disabilities lacked equitable access to public buildings and transportation. Activists reported many public schools, hospitals, and courts lacked ramps to enable access for persons with disabilities. Disability rights activists reported government offices did not always use sign-language interpreters during official communications and did not provide persons living with visual disability with written information in alternative formats such as braille or large format printing while making official communications.

Human rights activists reported authorities failed to protect persons with disabilities from harassment and violence from some sections of the community. Activists reported many police and local government officials lacked knowledge of the specific needs of persons with disabilities, especially persons with mental illness, and many times encouraged and participated in harassment. Disability activists reported some police officers arrested persons living with mental illness,

accusing them of being a public nuisance. Activists also reported inadequate and substandard sanitation facilities for persons with disabilities at public health centers exposed them to unhygienic conditions and infections. Human rights activists also reported persons with disabilities experienced discrimination in social service delivery and employment, while women with disabilities were at higher risk of rape and sexual harassment than women without disabilities. In April, activists reported government officials did not fulfil a 10 percent quota it allocated for persons with disabilities in its poverty alleviation programs, noting officials prevented persons with disabilities from creating credit and savings organizations, a prerequisite for accessing credit lines, and instead directed them to join preexisting organizations. Activists also reported legal provisions, such as requiring persons with disabilities seeking electoral office to prove they were of sound mind, discouraged women with disabilities from seeking electoral office.

Human rights activists reported many parents of children with disabilities in rural and remote areas hid them from the public and denied them an education due to public stigma.

OTHER SOCIETAL VIOLENCE OR DISCRIMINATION

Mob violence was prevalent. Communities often resorted to mob violence due to a lack of confidence in police and the judiciary to deliver justice. Mobs often beat, lynched, burned, and otherwise brutalized persons suspected of robbery, homicide, rape, theft, ritual sacrifice, and witchcraft, among other offenses. On April 12, local media reported a mob in Kayunga town lynched a man suspected of theft.

HIV-related stigma and discrimination were a concern in some employment situations. Police, the prison service, and the military regularly refused to recruit persons living with HIV and AIDS, claiming their bodies were too weak for the rigorous training and subsequent deployment. According to local media, labor export companies required applicants seeking work in Gulf countries to undergo HIV tests and refused to hire persons living with HIV and AIDS. Civil society organizations also reported employers declined to employ persons living with HIV and AIDS as domestic workers.

Section 7.

Worker Rights

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The law provided for workers, except members of the armed forces, to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (Ministry of Labour) had to register unions before they could engage in collective bargaining. The law required registration of a labor union be completed within 90 days and provided the registrar authority to suspend and interdict a union elected officer if the officer was convicted by a court of law or under investigation with potential prosecution. The law gave the registrar authority to cancel a union's registration if the union's principal objectives or constitution became unlawful. The law did not define what constituted unlawful objectives. The law precluded noncitizens from becoming members of the executive committee of a trade union. The law gave the registrar authority to inspect the trade union books of account and membership.

The law allowed unions to conduct activities without interference, prohibited antiunion discrimination by employers, and provided for reinstatement of workers dismissed for union activity. The law also empowered the minister of labor and labor officers to refer disputes to the

Industrial Court if initial mediation and arbitration attempts failed. The law, however, gave government labor officers power to declare industrial actions illegal if a given officer took steps to resolve the labor dispute in question through conciliation. The NGO Platform for Labor Action (PLA) reported funding shortfalls in the judiciary prevented recruitment of adequate judicial officers in the Industrial Court, which delayed resolution of cases.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Civil society organizations stated Ministry of Labour officials did not allocate sufficient funds to hire, train, and equip labor officers to enforce labor laws effectively. Employers who violated a worker's right to form and join a trade union or bargain collectively faced penalties that were not commensurate with similar abuses, and penalties were rarely applied against violators. Administrative and judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals. The PLA reported some companies refused to honor awards handed down by the Industrial Courts, and workers were forced to incur additional costs for the proceedings.

The government and employers generally did not respect the constitutionally guaranteed rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. The law did not provide trade union federations with a right to engage in collective bargaining and further imposed mandatory conciliation to resolve labor disputes before a strike action was recognized. The law gave the government the right to declare a strike illegal, and the minister of labor had authority to refer a dispute to the Industrial Court. The PLA reported workers in informal sectors such as domestic work, artisanal mining, and transport had a weaker right to freedom of association and lacked the ability to organize collective bargaining measures. The government restricted some union activity through issuance of threats and harassment of union leaders, especially of medical workers' unions. Under the law, trade unions were required to provide notice and adhere to the time limits set for public meetings. Essential service employees were required to provide 14 to 22 days' notice of their intent to strike; however, the law gave the minister authority to nullify the notice by referring the matter to the Industrial Court for arbitration and settlement within 14 days.

Public health workers' unions staged strikes during the year, largely concerning delayed salaries and undelivered promises of salary raises. A section of senior public health workers referred to as Senior House Officers called several strikes to protest lengthy delays of more than six months for payment of allowances. A Ministry of Health official told the health workers the government did not make provisions for their allowances, but the workers called off the strike after receiving assurances from the government it would make the payments.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

C. PROHIBITION OF CHILD LABOR AND MINIMUM AGE FOR EMPLOYMENT

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

Wage and Hour Laws: The law technically provided for a national minimum wage that was much lower than the government's official poverty income level. This minimum wage standard was never

implemented, and the level was unchanged since 1984.

The maximum legal workweek was 48 hours, and the maximum workday was 10 hours. The law provided that the workweek could be extended to 56 hours, including overtime, with the employee's consent. An employee could work more than 10 hours in a single day if the average number of hours over a period of three weeks did not exceed 10 hours per day or 56 hours per week. For employees who worked beyond 48 hours in a single week, the law required employers to pay a minimum of 1.5 times the employee's normal hourly rate for the overtime hours, and twice the employee's normal hourly rate for work on public holidays. According to labor rights organizations, violations of wage, hour, or overtime laws were common in the informal sector, particularly in domestic work, agriculture, manufacturing, and mining.

Occupational Safety and Health: The law established appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards and regulations for all workers. The law authorized labor inspectors in the Ministry of Labour's Department of Occupational Safety and Health to access and examine any workplace unannounced, issue fines, and mediate some labor disputes. While the law allowed workers to remove themselves from situations endangering their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, legal protection for such workers was ineffective. According to the PLA, most workers were unaware of their employers' responsibility to ensure a safe working environment, and many did not challenge unsafe working conditions due to fear of losing their jobs.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Labour and local government labor offices were responsible for enforcement of wage and hour laws, but the government did not effectively enforce them. Inspection was insufficient to enforce compliance. In addition to inspectors, labor officers conducted inspections of worksites and examined standards of employment and workers' rights more broadly. Labor officers had the authority to make unannounced inspections, initiate sanctions, instigate prosecutions of repeat offenders through the Industrial Court, and close worksites. With 189 labor officers covering more than 130 districts, the number of labor officers combined with the 21 labor inspectors was insufficient for the size of the country's 15 million workers. Labor officers often depended on complainants and local civil society organizations to pay for their travel to inspection sites. PLA officials reported many of the labor officers were dual-hatted as social workers and did labor-related work only when a complainant reported an abuse. PLA officials also reported companies often did not respect recommendations made by labor officers during workplace inspections, including providing contracts or protective wear, or they bribed labor officers to prevent them from issuing penalties.

Authorities rarely enforced labor laws on wages and hours, and penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. The legal minimum wage was never implemented, and civil society organizations reported most domestic employees worked all year without leave. Wage arrears were common in both the public and private sectors. Workers' claims for overtime wages were difficult to enforce as they lacked documentation of their accumulated hours. PLA officials reported abuses of standard wages and overtime pay were common in the manufacturing, education, private security, retail, agriculture, private health care, domestic work, and transport sectors.

The same inspectors conducted wage, hour, and OSH inspections. Authorities rarely enforced OSH laws, and penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses. Penalties were rarely enforced against violators. Workers in the mining, construction, and textile sectors faced hazardous and exploitive working conditions. The PLA reported abuses of safety and health standards were common in the manufacturing, education, private security, and transport sectors.

According to 2017 government statistics, the most recent available, the informal sector employed up to 86 percent of the labor force, primarily in agriculture, the service industry, trade, domestic work, construction, and transport. Labor officials reported labor laws did not effectively protect workers in the informal economy, including many domestic and agricultural workers. Live-in domestic workers were at increased risk of poor working conditions, forced to work longer hours without compensation in homes during lockdown periods, often not provided with medical care, and subject to reduced wages.

