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Country Report on Terrorism 2023 - Chapter 1 - Uganda

Overview: There were multiple terrorist incidents in Uganda in 2023, with the most high-profile ones resulting in the deaths of more 40 students in June and two foreign tourists and their Uganda guide in Queen Elizabeth National Park in October. Ugandan security forces arrested numerous alleged members of ISIS-Democratic Republic of the Congo (ISIS-DRC, also known as the Allied Democratic Forces, or ADF), including the leader of the cell responsible for the tourist killings, and prevented several attack plots from coming to fruition.

The Uganda Peoples' Defense Forces (UPDF) withdrew its contingent to the East African Community Regional Force from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) but continued its joint operation with the Armed Forces of the DRC to combat the ADF in the eastern DRC. Uganda's withdrawal of its contingent to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia was on hold in 2023, but it transferred at least one Forward Operating Base (FOB) to Somali Security Forces. In May, al-Shabaab attacked and overran a Ugandan FOB, killing at least 54 UPDF. In domestic affairs, the Government of Uganda (GOU) remained a capable partner in countering violent extremism, although significant human rights concerns still existed within some security services.

2023 Terrorist Incidents: The following four incidents reflect a sample of attacks in 2023:

- On June 16, suspected members of ISIS-DRC attacked a school in Mpondwe Town, Kasese District, killing at least 42 civilians.
- On October 17, suspected ISIS-DRC terrorists killed two tourists – one British, the other South African – as well as their Ugandan guide, as they toured Queen Elizabeth National Park in western Uganda.

- On December 18, suspected ISIS-DRC terrorists killed at least 10 civilians in Kitehurizi village in western Uganda.
- On December 26, suspected ISIS-DRC terrorists killed at least three persons in Nyabitusi village in western Uganda.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There have been no changes to legislation. In response to an uptick in terrorist attacks, however, security agencies arrested several suspected ADF militants.

- On May 1, security agents in Buikwe District, central Uganda, arrested three suspected members of ISIS-DRC: Yasin Ssenyonga, Abubakari Katakuwange, and Juma Mwinomuze.
- On June 19 the police arrested at least 20 people suspected of collaborating with ISIS-DRC. The arrested individuals included the head of a school in Mpondwe Town, Kasese District, where terrorists had killed at least 42 people, including approximately 38 students, on June 16.
- On October 24 the police announced the arrest of at least 24 suspected ISIS-DRC members in Kyankwanzi District, western Uganda, accused of trying to establish a local cell. By the end of 2023, none of the arrested individuals had been arraigned. Also in October, the Ugandan military stepped up its patrols along the border with the DRC in a bid to deter militants from crossing into Uganda.
- On November 2 the government arrested suspected ISIS-DRC commander Abdul Rashid Kyote, whose unit allegedly carried out the October 17 attack on the two tourists and their guide in Queen Elizabeth National Park. On November 13, Kyote was arraigned and charged with terrorism, murder, and robbery before being remanded to custody.
- On December 5, police arrested suspected ISIS-DRC militant Lavara Nyanza in Jinja, eastern Uganda. The police also published photos and sought information on two other suspected terrorists, Ismail Mutegule and Abdallah Kala. Following the arrest of Nyanza, the United States issued two security alerts cautioning its citizens against travelling to Jinja. By the end of 2023, Nyanza was still being held in custody pending trial.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Uganda is a member of the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group, and its Financial Intelligence Unit, the Financial Intelligence Authority, is a member of the Egmont Group. Uganda remained on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) gray list in 2023.

In 2023, FATF that reported Uganda demonstrated progress in strengthening its anti-money laundering and countering the financing of

terrorism (AML/CFT) regime, including by demonstrating that law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities apply the money laundering offense consistent with the identified risks; establishing and implementing policies and procedures for identifying, tracing, seizing and confiscating proceeds and instrumentalities of crime; and developing and implementing risk-based supervision of financial institutions and designated nonfinancial businesses and professions. In August, Uganda assessed its vulnerability to threats associated with terrorist financing and found non-profit organizations that operated in areas of heightened insecurity, notably along Uganda's borders with both the DRC and South Sudan, were vulnerable to abuse. The report concluded that Uganda's "regulatory capacity to provide oversight and enforce compliance... is still limited." In October, FATF made the initial determination that Uganda had substantially completed its action plan and warranted an onsite assessment to verify that the implementation of AML/CFT reforms had begun and was being sustained, and that the necessary political commitment remained in place to sustain implementation in the future. In December a delegation from FATF visited Uganda to conduct an assessment expected to result in the country's removal from the FATF gray list in 2024.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no significant changes in 2023. The National Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, adopted by the GOU in 2022, had not yet been implemented by the end of 2023 owing to disagreement over which agency should lead the effort.

International and Regional Counterterrorism Cooperation: In September the Ugandan military reportedly killed "several ADF rebels," including ADF commander Meddie Nkalubo who, according to Ugandan security agencies, had masterminded two terrorist attacks in Uganda in 2021. Also in September, President Yoweri Museveni told reporters that since the launch of Operation Shujaa (a joint military operation between the UPDF and the Congolese Armed Forces [FARDC]), more than 567 ISIS-DRC militants had been killed. Although Uganda withdrew its contingent to the East African Community Regional Force from the DRC in December, the UPDF's cooperation with FARDC under Operation Shujaa continued unabated.

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