



December 31st, 2020

ActionAid condemns the Continued Attack on Journalists

ActionAid International Uganda (AAIU) is concerned about the continuous and targeted attack and harassment of journalists, and particularly journalists covering the political campaigns in the lead up to the 2021 general elections. The threats, harassment, physical attack, and enforcement of an onerous compliance environment for journalists fits within a broader trend of obstruction of civic and professional duty and rights guaranteed by the Ugandan Constitution. It is ironical that state security forces and institutions mandated to protect citizens are targeting journalists during a period of electoral campaigns – a period when citizens are supposed to freely express themselves.

While the targeted attacks on journalists and obstruction of their has been on a worrisome trend, the injury of three journalists on Sunday 27th December 2020, as police dispersed Honorable Kyagulanyi Robert's supporters in Masaka highlights the deteriorating working environment for journalists. AAIU condemns the shooting of Ashraf Kasirye, a reporter with Ghetto TV, the hitting of NTV reporter Ali Mivule by a tear gas canister in the leg, and the injury of NBS TV senior reporter Daniel Lutaaya after falling off a boda boda as he tried to escape the stampede.

A free press is critical to citizen participation in elections by providing access to information enabling them to make informed choices in an election where political campaigns have already been limited by public health restrictions due to COVID-19. We commend the resilience of the media and individual journalists in informing the public on the current socioeconomic and political issues, including exposing violations against citizens, civil society, political actors, as well excesses of public officials. We are concerned that targeted violence against journalists, their intimidation and legal harassment does not only restrict their freedom of expression and professional practice, but also denies the citizens access to a balanced information and political opinions. We are dismayed by the reluctance and lack of interest by the security forces and state institutions to hold accountable and bring to book officials who continue to violate the rights of citizens with impunity.

We remind the government of Uganda that the ability of journalists to speak truth to power, investigate abuses, contribute to and strengthen public debate is sacrosanct to a democratic society. ActionAid International Uganda joins the rest of civil society in condemning the targeted violation of the rights of journalists and obstruction of their work.

We stand in solidarity with the journalists' fraternity in Uganda, their families and all those championing independent media, freedom of expression and access to information in Uganda as guaranteed by the constitution and laws of Uganda as a key pillar of democracy in Uganda.

Call to Action

1. ActionAid International Uganda, therefore, calls on the government to urgently take steps to tackle impunity at multiple levels, including:
 - Ensure independent, prompt, thorough, and effective investigations into the recent cases of harassment and breach of rights of journalists
 - Prosecute those who commit crimes against journalists, including those who command, conspire to commit, aid and abet, or cover up such crimes
 - Ensure victims of crimes against journalists and their families have access to appropriate remedies, including political commitment to address impunity.

2. While we appreciate the National Association of Broadcasters' (NAB) public condemnation of the continued attack, harassment and obstruction of journalists covering the political campaigns, we call on the media owners in Uganda to:
 - Demand the state to protect the rights of all journalists in their line of duty. They should ensure their dialogue with state institutions and media regulators lays out clear benchmarks on the safety of journalists
 - Ensure better facilitation to journalists to enable them to undertake their jobs independently and safely
 - Join hands with civil society and other stakeholders in reclaiming media freedom and independence, the rights of journalists recognizing that their commercial interests can only be sustained where these freedoms are respected and protected.



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