



POLICE SIEGE AT NGO OFFICES

POLICE RAIDS ACTION AID, GLISS OFFICES

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Police raided the ActionAid offices along that of the Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies (GLISS) on Wednesday, hours before the Igara West MP legislator Raphael Magyezi was expected to ask Parliament's permission to allow him table a Private Members Bill which, among other amendments, seeks to scrap the presidential age limit. Details on this in this edition.

When Police sieged ActionAid Offices!



Images in and around the ActionAid offices when they were sieged by the Uganda Police. It was not possible to get better images because the Police Officers became hostile at the site of a camera.

At about 4:30 pm on Wednesday 20th September 2017, about 20 members of the Uganda Police Force surrounded and held siege of ActionAid Uganda Kampala Offices and our partners, the Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies (GLISS). In both cases the police had search warrants issued by the Chief Magistrate court of Makindye indicating that they were looking for information relating to illicit financial activities.

While the motives are not as clear given the broad and vague search warrant, it is clear that this siege is part of a wider crackdown on dissent of citizens, their formations and organisations working on governance in the context of an ongoing clandestine move by the ruling NRM party to amend Article 102 (b) of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda that puts a cap on the age limit for the president between 35 and 75 years.

All staff in office at the time were prevented from leaving as the police thoroughly searched the premises, extracting information of selected computers, picked some documents and confiscated 3 (three) cell-phones and 2 (two) laptops of some key staff.

The search of the office premises proceeded into the second day and the police left in the afternoon promising to continue with their investigations this week. While the offices remain accessible and with operations returning to normalcy, the office of the Program Director remains cordoned off pending further investigations.

Despite the inconvenience that the staff were exposed to, they remain resilient, strong and committed to the struggle in pursuit of social justice for the poor and marginalised communities.

In a statement issued by the Country Director of AAU, he assured partners, communities that we work with and the general public that ActionAid is a law abiding organisation and shall continue to pursue its mission in identifying with struggles of the poor and excluded transparently, in a bid to end poverty.

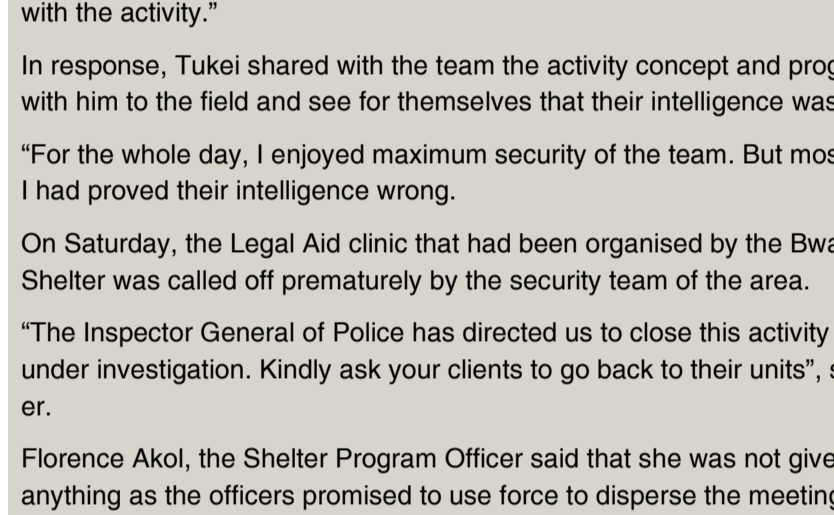
"We are shocked that the Police have taken this action given that they claim 'as long as the NGOs abide with the law and their mandate, nobody will interfere with their activities. We remain focused on our mission for social justice despite the inconvenience caused by the police cordon and search operation this week.

Arthur added,

"We are fulfilling our legal obligations. We are committed to continuing our work and we expect the Police to respect our rights as an autonomous and independent civil society organisation. The accusations against us are completely unfounded and could harm the people and communities whom we work with, our partners and civil society in general."

"ActionAid remains committed to working with and supporting Uganda's civil society and fight for justice and democracy", he concluded.

Work stopped-Work goes on in the AAU offices



The Bwaise team was forced to prematurely close the legal aid clinic for fear of being arrested in a similar manner while Police simply observed during the activity in Katakwi

Work in the ActionAid Katakwi office almost came to a standstill when the AAU staff were intercepted by the district security team on their way to the field.

Benjamin Tukei, the AAU Program Officer in Katakwi who was going to distribute relief items and kick start the message collection exercise from the sponsored children was informed by the District Security Officer and District Police Commander that he would not proceed with the activity.

"We have intelligence information that ActionAid is planning to mobilize 30 people per sub county to protest against the removal of the presidential age limit. You therefore cannot proceed with the activity."

In response, Tukei shared with the team the activity concept and program and invited them to go with him to the field and see for themselves that their intelligence was wrong.

"For the whole day, I enjoyed maximum security of the field. But most importantly, I was happy that I had proved their intelligence wrong.

On Saturday, the Legal Aid clinic that had been organised by the Bwaise Gender Based Violence Shelter was called off prematurely by the security team of the area.

"The Inspector General of Police has directed us to close this activity because ActionAid is currently under investigation. Kindly ask your clients to go back to their units", stated there Police commander.

Florence Akol, the Shelter Program Officer said that she was not given an opportunity to explain anything as the officers promised to use force to disperse the meeting if they did not abide by the order.

In Makerere however, the students freely participated in a Paper competition on Freedom of expression and Cyber/Internet Rights. The hosts (University Administration) took off a moment to express their solidarity with ActionAid, adding that they are an academic institution that upholds and fights for good Governance in the country at all levels.

We are following the developments in all our field and head office activities and will send a timely update to you all.

ActionAid International stands in Solidarity with AAU



Moments with Adriano last Friday! He said that the Federation was happy with the work in Uganda and should be upheld.

On hearing that the ActionAid Uganda offices had been sieged by the Uganda Police, Adriano Campolina, the Secretary General of ActionAid International took the first flight to Uganda.

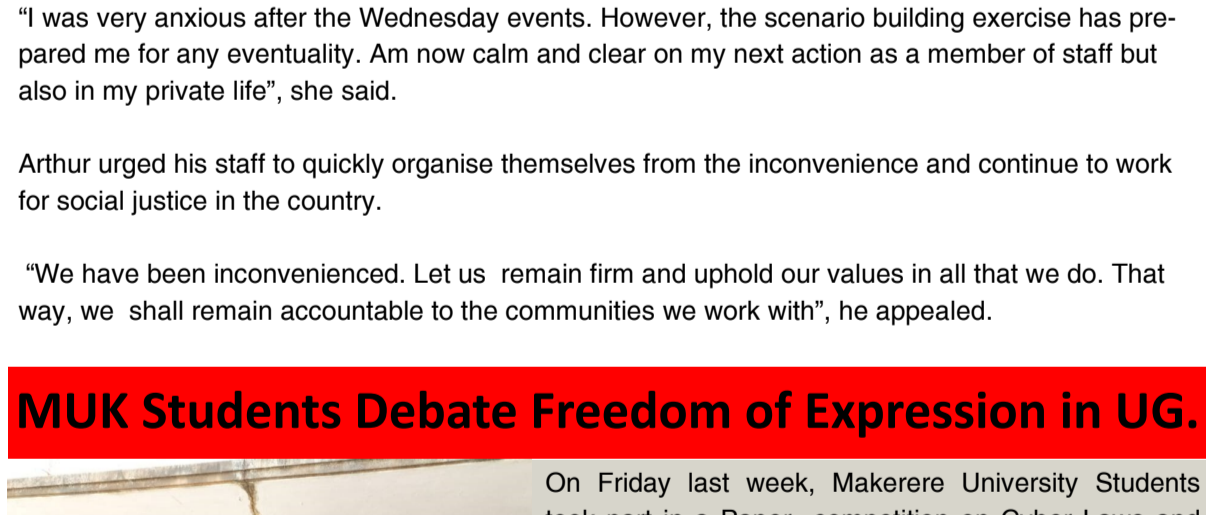
"I booked my flight immediately because I had to be here with you in solidarity", he said.

In a meeting with key staff on Friday morning, Adriano stated that the federation would stand by AAU at this moment and this should keep the team strong and going. He however asked staff not to underrate the effect that the siege may have on individual staff and should take time off to heal.

After meeting staff, Adriano met with the Lawyers that are supporting AAU during this time but also conducted the international secretariat in a Facebook video and local media in a private meeting place.

See [Adriano's interview with NTV here](#) and the [Facebook Video address here](#).

Scenario Building Exercise-AAU Strategizes after Siege



A few staff turned up on Thursday and engaged in the Scenario building exercise. It was an empowering exercise that saw staff jointly think through and develop four possible scenarios of what could happen to ActionAid Uganda from best case to worst case and what actions to take in the event of any.

While the police continued their search of the AAU premises, the available staff, led by the Country Director, Arthur Larok went into a scenario building exercise. The session started with a reflection from each staff about the office siege on a personal level. This enabled the team to touch base with each other and come up with a therapeutic plan to support the staff who were traumatised or affected by the events.

Divided into two teams, the staff shared thoughts of best and worst case scenario from the police siege. This enabled them map out clear actions that would mitigate the risks and dangers that each scenario poses both on the organisation and personal lives of staff.

Fiona Awilli, the Partnerships Officer stated that the exercise had enabled her to calm down since their was a clear road map of actions to be taken in any case scenario.

"I was very anxious after the Wednesday events. However, the scenario building exercise has prepared me for any eventuality. Am now calm and clear on my next action as a member of staff but also in my private life", she said.

Arthur urged his staff to quickly organise themselves from the inconvenience and continue to work for social justice in the country.

"We have been inconvenienced. Let us remain firm and uphold our values in all that we do. That way, we shall remain accountable to the communities we work with", he appealed.

MUK Students Debate Freedom of Expression in UG.



Three of these brilliant minds will walk away with cash prizes at the Cyber Laws and Internet Freedom Convention to be held tomorrow at Makerere University

On Friday last week, Makerere University Students took part in a Paper competition on Cyber Laws and Internet Freedoms. They presented Papers on the existing cyber laws in Uganda, how they shape freedom of expression and made recommendations to enhance freedom of expression for internet users.

The activity is a build up to the global campaign called SPEAK! aimed at giving voice to everyone, everywhere. The campaign (which ActionAid is taking part in) was created in response to the current global context, in which people around the world and in the country are facing increasing attacks on their basic freedoms, and a culture of division is causing many to turn against each other.

SPEAK! is the evolution of the Global Day of Citizen Action. It will culminate in three days of global action from 22-24 September. On Friday 22nd, the world will fall silent, in solidarity with those who have been jailed or killed for daring to raise their voice. Then, on the weekend of Saturday 23rd & Sunday 24th, the world will speak as one, with hundreds of events being held around the world. CIVICUS invites organizations around the world to take part in SPEAK! in 2017 by creating an event or action, participating in something happening nearby, or jo

The presentations made before a panel of four judges (Civil Society and University Dons), were aimed at showcasing in depth knowledge and understanding of existing Cyber laws in the country and how these infringe on freedom of expression.

Students emphasized that freedom of expression which is guaranteed by Article 29 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda is both a cornerstone of democracy and the basis of other rights and freedoms in general. They cited the Constitution and other international laws which guarantees that every Ugandan shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media.

Students also put forward recommendations on how Ugandan cyber laws can be made consistent with the International Human Rights Standards on freedom of expression and right to privacy in the digital environment rather than gagging free speech.

The top three winners of this competition will walk away with cash prizes of UGX 600,000, UGX 300,000 and UGX 100,000 at the convention on Cyber Laws which is scheduled to take place on Tomorrow at Makerere University Main Hall.

SPEAK!, under which this event is organized is the evolution of the Global Day of Citizen Action. It will culminate in three days of global action in solidarity with those who have been jailed or killed for daring to raise their voice against social injustices.

Week Ahead

- ActionAid will this week train its staff in Shrinking Political Space and Social Movements. The training is meant to build staff's knowledge base on the two concepts and prepare them for the rollout of the 5th Strategy Paper.
- The organisation's Management Audit committee will be meeting this week to review the quarter that ends this month.
- ActionAid is currently hosting a team from ActionAid Denmark (AADK). They are in the country to discuss improved programming and delivery of the AADK funded programs
- ActionAid together with Makerere University have organised a Cyber Rights and Internet Freedoms Convention to be held tomorrow at the MUK main Hall.