



Statement for publication

Government should protect Human Rights Defenders during elections period

Kampala, September 28, 2015: We, the National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders in Uganda (NCHRDU), hereby call upon the government to protect Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in this election period.

Human rights defenders are people who, individually or with others, take action to promote and protect human rights. We urge the government to support HRDs and their work, by ensuring their protection, security, safety and dignity.

It is primarily the duty of states to protect and promote human rights of their citizens. HRDs play a key role in documenting and calling attention to situations where states do not fulfil this duty and human rights violations are committed. HRDs are often spokespersons for vulnerable and marginalized groups or for people who are not in a position to defend them. In many cases, HRDs represent grass-roots movements that are working to ensure justice and to secure the implementation of human rights standards in their country. Supporting their work is an investment in the rule of law, democracy and free and fair elections we all aspire for.

We have noted with concern that human rights defenders in Uganda face a myriad of challenges including death threats, harassment, torture, beatings, arbitrary arrest, killings, detention, defamation as well as restrictions on their freedoms of movement, expression, association and assembly. These threats are presented by both state and non-state actors who are mainly influenced by political decision making processes. Non state actors include armed groups, corporations, and individuals.





Yet-human rights defenders are important partners for our government and in the election period, as they are able to provide insight into and information about matters pertaining in different areas of Uganda.

According to the Uganda Human Rights Commission 17th Annual report, 2014, HRDs continue to face challenges such as arbitrary arrests, harassments, intimidation, threats, killings, detention, torture, defamation, suspension from their employment, denial of freedom of movement and difficulty in obtaining legal recognition for their association and failure for the state to prosecute those who have violated the rights of HRDS. Similarly the Public Order Management Act (2013 and the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Registration Amendment Act (2006), among others, limit activities of HRDs. These laws have undermined the work of HRDs and the enforcement of these laws by the police has led to cases of abuse, torture and ill treatment, malicious prosecution, emotional and psychological distress on HRDs.

Recognition that human rights defenders are key agents of change has been at the top of the agenda of world leaders. For instance world leaders have increasingly committed to promote and create a safe space in which HRDs can work safely, without the threat of arrest or intimidation.

The government of Uganda through different laws, organs and policies has made commendable strides in the protection of human rights, and protecting and promoting the work of HRDs will help in reducing human rights abuses in the country.

HRDs in different parts of Uganda continue to be vital to the development of democratic processes and institutions, ending impunity, promotion and protection of human rights and highlighted cases of human rights that the government wouldn't otherwise be aware of. This shows that HRDs can help to ensure long term sustainable development based on human rights. They deserve everyone's support as well as protection by the government.

We specifically appeal to the government of Uganda to:





EAST AND
HORN OF
AFRICA
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS
PROJECT
(EHAHRDP)



1. Ensure that HRDs work in a safe and enabling environment and where violations are committed they are promptly and fairly investigated.
2. Ensure that journalists who cover elections are given access and are not attacked and their equipment protected.
3. Ensure that the safety of HRDs who monitor and observe elections is guaranteed and that they are enabled to reach all locations including polling stations.
4. Enable defenders to monitor and document all violations without any hindrance and that they can access all the necessary information.

For more Information Contact: National Coordinator Ms. Brenda Kugonza katwoki@gmail.com
+256-772-573-398

