



UGANDA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

STATEMENT IN COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2021 UNDER THE THEME, "REBUILDING BETTER: RESILIENT INSTITUTIONS KEY TO COVID-19 RECOVERY"

This week, Uganda joins the rest of the world to commemorate the International Human Rights Day which is celebrated every 10th of December. The International theme for this year is, "***Reducing Inequalities, Advancing Human Rights***". The national theme is "***Rebuilding Better: Resilient Institutions Key to COVID-19 Recovery***".

As has been our practice, we join hands with key partners in the human rights movement to jointly commemorate the day as a way of underscoring the importance of human rights as a strong foundation for attaining sustainable development. In addition, let us reflect on the human rights situation in Uganda and recommit ourselves to the promotion and protection of human rights for all.

The commemoration this year comes at a time when Uganda is due for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva, Switzerland in January 2022. The UPR will assess progress on the 2016 recommendations, and pledges that Uganda as a state party made to improve the human rights situation in the country.

The human rights situation in Uganda

Uganda has made strides in addressing human rights concerns during 2021. The Commission uplauds;

- a) the bold pronouncements of the President of the Republic of Uganda, H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni severally condemning incidents of human rights violations, and specifically torture. This was during his 16th May 2017 circular to security agencies and law enforcement chiefs, his address to the nation at Kololo Independence Grounds in Kampala on 4th June 2021 and his national address on COVID-19 on 14th August 2021;
- b) Efforts by the Prisons Services to protect prisoners from COVID-19 amidst challenges of overcrowding in places of detention which were exacerbated by incarceration of offenders of the COVID-19 guidelines;
- c) Engagement of the Uganda Human Rights Commission to be part of the COVID-19 taskforce to ensure that the rights particularly of vulnerable persons such as people living with HIV/AIDS, pregnant mothers and people with other conditions are able to access medical care.
- d) His Excellency the President for ensuring provision of food to non-salary earners during lockdown;
- e) Government for promoting the rights and dignity of older persons through appointing a Minister in charge of the elderly and providing special representation for the elderly in all elective bodies;
- f) Government's response to the flash floods in Kasese as River Nyamwamba and River Mubuku burst their banks and the landslides in Bududa and Bulambuli which resulted into loss of lives and property, displacement of vulnerable persons from their homes.
- g) The Police for their rapid and effective response to the recent terrorist attacks which prevented worse consequences.

Key Emerging human rights concerns in Uganda

These achievements come against a backdrop of challenges with human rights implications, some of which were unprecedented. They include;

1. The incidents of terrorist bombings in the country and the attendant repercussions, including loss of lives, bodily injuries, damage to property and causing fear among the population. Whereas we commend the Police and UPDF for their rapid and continuing efforts to restore lasting peace in the country, there are allegations of extra-judicial killings in the aftermath of the terror attacks;
2. The COVID-19 pandemic and the human rights implications such as restrictions on freedom of movement which affects access to social services and amenities such as health care and education, and has also greatly impacted the economic wellbeing of Ugandans;
3. The closure of 54 Non-Government Organisations by the NGO Bureau on 27th August 2021.

Recently, we issued a statement condemning the terror attacks, commiserating with families that lost their loved ones and praying for a quick recovery for the injured. We also called for speedy and appropriate redress for victims of the bomb attacks and called on citizens to respect the rule of law and use peaceful means to resolve conflicts. We urged the responsible agencies to expedite investigations and bring the perpetrators to justice. We called on the people of Uganda to be law abiding and to respect the rights and freedoms of others. Today, we reiterate this call and emphasise that national peace and security is at the centre of realization of individual rights and

freedoms. We remind the Armed Forces that in the performance of their duties, they must respect human rights and freedoms.

The Commission pledges to continue empowering citizens with continuous human rights education so that they can comply with the law and fulfil their civic duties and responsibilities such as the duty to respect the rights and freedoms of others, protect and preserve public property and co-operate with lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order. We also pledge to continue investigating and hearing cases of violations of human rights, and supporting the State to meet its International human rights obligations.

Joint commemoration activities

The Commission and our partners have organised joint commemoration activities this year to contribute to the national efforts towards rebuilding resilient institutions.

We will hold a joint advocacy campaign to:

- Bring together key stakeholders to dialogue on the state of human rights in the country amidst the COVID-19 pandemic challenges, and suggest areas of improvement in rebuilding resilient institutions going forward.
- Provide a platform for key stakeholders to share their achievements, challenges and strategies on how to improve the realisation of human rights in their respective institutions during the current COVID-19 recovery period.
- Reflect on the human rights that have been most affected during the Covid-19 pandemic and provide synergies to demand accountability and action for intervention and improvement from duty bearers.
- Empower the general public to know their rights, duties and responsibilities through awareness creation.
- Enhance the advocacy for mass vaccination against the coronavirus.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the dialogue will mainly use electronic and online platforms. The joint activities include:

1. An online media campaign using both conventional and social media platforms. The online media campaign will be through the hashtag **#HumanRightsDayUG21**. The traditional media engagement will include live talk shows on various radios in Kampala, Gulu and Karamoja region and televisions.
2. A Human Rights Clinic from Monday 6th to Friday 10th December 2021 organised by Wakiso District Human Rights Committee, with support from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kampala.
3. A televised E- Public Dialogue on the theme, which will be broadcast live on NTV on Friday 10th December 2021 from 10.00 am to 12:00 noon as the main commemoration event.

We therefore invite the public to join the conversation on the various online and digital platforms as a way of ensuring your participation in the commemoration to make your voices heard.

Recommendations

The Commission and partners annually draw on their synergies to make recommendations during the commemoration for the improvement of the state of human rights in the country. Today we recognize that steps have been taken by both state and non-state actors to address a number of our recommendations over the years. Notable among them was our advocacy to have a fully constituted Uganda Human Rights Commission which was eventually achieved following my appointment as Chairperson, together with 4 members of the Commission in August 2021. The Commission is now fully executing its constitutional mandate.

On the remaining challenges, the Commission recommends the following:


- Both State and non-state actors are reminded to desist from acts of torture and cruelty; note that freedom from torture is a non-derogable right enshrined under Article 44 in the 1995 Constitution of Uganda and other international instruments which Uganda has ratified.

- The Ministry of Finance should operationalize the President's directive to fully fund the Uganda Human Rights Commission.
- Quarterly meetings with security forces and relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies to ensure coordinated efforts to improve the human rights efforts in the country.

The Uganda Human Rights Commission is grateful for the financial and technical support towards this event from the Government of Uganda and development partners including the German-Ugandan Development Cooperation (GIZ) and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We also recognise the support from local partners namely the African Center for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture (ACTV), and Refugee Law Project.

As a Commission, we intend to put at the forefront group rights such as the right to a clean and healthy environment, the right to peace and security, the right to adequate health care, the right to education, the right to development etc. We believe that as we strive to protect group rights, we shall progressively achieve the enjoyment of all other rights for all people.

For God and My Country



MARIAM WANGADYA

CHAIRPERSON,

UGANDA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION