

BI-ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

A Report on the Human Rights Situation in 14 Target Districts in Uganda

April – December 2024





Chapter Four Uganda is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organisation, established in 2013, to defend civil liberties and promote human rights for all. We provide bold and innovative legal response through strategic and public interest litigation, legal representation in first line response cases, legal research, general counsel for civil society organisations and strategic advocacy. We work with the most vulnerable and underrepresented sections of the society.

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This 2nd Bi-Annual Human Rights Report is a publication of Chapter Four Uganda. It provides a brief on our findings of the human rights situations in 14 project target districts in Uganda.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIIJ	African Institute for Investigative Journalism
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
DRCC	Deputy Resident City Commissioner
EACOP	East African Crude Oil Pipeline
EU	European Union
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
KCCA	Kampala City Council Authority
LDU	Local Defence Unit
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NUP	National Unity Platform
PAU	Petroleum Authority of Uganda
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
LC	Local Council
SD	State Diary
TD	Target District
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority

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SUMMARY

This second bi-annual human rights report for the period April – December 2024 provides key findings on the state of civil liberties in the 14 target districts (TDs) of Kampala and Wakiso (Central Region), Kotido, Kween, Mbale, and Moroto (Eastern Region), Adjumani, Arua, Gulu, Kitgum, and Otuke (Northern Region), and Hoima, Kasese, and Kisoro (Western Region).

During the reporting period, incidents of extrajudicial killings resulting in unlawful deprivation of the right to life were documented in the districts of Kotido and Moroto. This was partly attributed to the ongoing UPDF cordon and search operations in the two districts and other parts of the Karamoja sub-region. The two TDs also registered the highest cases of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention, and torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Several reports of violations of the right to peaceful assembly and to petition were reported during the research period. This was mainly experienced in Kampala and Wakiso Districts in the central region. For instance, when young people came together to organise the peaceful anti-corruption protests in July 2024 under the “*#March2Parliament*” slogan, the Uganda Police Force responded with unlawful force to block the protests, instead of facilitating the exercise of freedoms. On July 23, 2024, over 100 young people were arbitrarily arrested on the streets of Kampala for holding placards, and they were briefly detained at police stations before being produced in courts of law on charges of being a “common nuisance” to the public.

Human rights defenders working with civil society organisations in Uganda continued to report experiencing impediments in exercising the freedom of association. The Non-Governmental Organisations Act, 2016, remained in force. The law contained several mandatory and repressive obligations that made it difficult to register and operate organisations. For instance, NGOs experienced difficulties in processing the mandatory memorandum of understanding.

This report further highlights several incidents of inter-communal conflicts and mob action resulting in loss of life and violation of several fundamental rights and freedoms. This was mainly evidenced in Adjumani and Arua districts. Threats to the right to life were also documented in Kitgum and Kween districts, arising from attacks by wild animals from gazetted game reserves and national parks. There has been little accountability for the attacks.

Threats to the freedom of the press were also documented during the period. Attacks on journalists in the course of their work were reported in the TDs. Political interference and unjustified barriers hindered access to information, and many exercised censorship for fear of reprisal attacks. In some incidents, journalists were arrested and forced to delete footage from their cameras and other gadgets.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS BY DISTRICT / CITY

Adjumani District



Adjumani District is located in the Northern Region of Uganda. The district is one of the districts that form Uganda's common border with the Republic of South Sudan. Adjumani District hosts over 220,000 refugees from South Sudan and other parts of the region. The district is also home to Zoka Central Forest Reserve, one of the protected natural forests of Uganda. Environmental human rights defenders who work in the district to combat illegal logging and illicit charcoal trade often face many hurdles and reprisal attacks.

The Right to Integrity of the Person

The right to integrity requires the State to protect the right to life and respect the prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. During the reporting period, there were increased threats on the right to life in the district in incidents of mob action and intra-communal clashes. Residents decried loss of trust in the criminal justice system which compelled them to engage in acts of mob action. Suspects of crime, such as theft, became victims of mob violence. In one of the incidents, a group of residents of Adjumani Municipality rounded up a suspect of theft and stoned him to near death. The victim was rescued by the police.

In a related incident, two individuals who were accused of stealing a motorcycle sustained severe injuries from a mob attack in Karaoko Village in Adjumani Town Council. It also took police intervention to save his life. At a shop along Mangi Road in Adjumani Town, a suspected burglar was badly beaten for allegedly attempting to break into a general merchandise shop by cutting the roof of the shop. The unidentified suspect was later taken to Adjumani General Hospital by the police where he succumbed to the injuries from the beating.

On July 20, 2024, intra-communal clashes erupted in Boroli II Refugee Settlement. The fight took a tribal twist, pitting tribes within the settlement. Several houses were burnt, and, an unspecified number of people were injured. Fleeing the fight, the community, mainly women and children, pitched camp at a Boroli 1 Primary School. As a result of the fights, it was reported that at least 33 households were relocated to Majji Refugee Settlement.

On October 11, 2024, a communal fight between rival gangs of boys in Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement, Dzaipi Sub-County Adjumani District, left seven people injured, six were admitted at Nyumanzi Refugee

Settlement Health Centre while one person who was critically injured was admitted at Adjumani General Hospital for better medical management. According to eyewitnesses, the fight pitted a gang calling themselves “Black Niggas” and another unidentified group. However, the fight is also believed to be a spill-over of inter-communal fighting back home in South Sudan.

These actions of lawlessness undermined the principles of the rule of law and access to justice but also posed a threat to the right to life and freedom from torture and other forms of ill-treatment.

Personal Liberty

Incidents of arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention were also documented in the district. In one of the incidents, when a resident of Aliwara Village, Mungula Parish, Itirikwa Sub-County in Adjumani District who survived being killed after unknown assailants armed with pangas/machetes trailed her to the garden, went to report the incident at Adjumani Central Police Station, she was arbitrarily arrested under unclear circumstances. She was later released after spending one week in unlawful detention.

Arua City / District



Arua District is found in the West Nile sub-region. According to the 2024 census report by Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), Arua District has a population of about 3 million people. Arua Municipality attained city status in July 2020. The city has three divisions: Arua Central, Ayivu East and Ayivu West. The 2024 UBOS report indicates that Arua City has a population of over 440,540 people. The district is characterised by active politics where the leaders strive for it to be governed on different democratic principles.

Freedom of Expression

During the reporting period, several incidents of attacks on press freedom in Arua were documented. A number of journalists and media workers were targeted for publishing stories that were critical of the local government officials.

For instance, in May 2024, Fredrick Dramadri, a journalist working with Voice of Life Radio Station was reportedly threatened by Mr Ham Muzamil, the Deputy Resident City Commissioner (DRCC). The

research found that the DRCC attempted to gag the journalist by blocking a story that was to be aired on the radio station.¹

“You may be aware that from May 14th to 17th, 2024, I have been experiencing tough times in Arua City after rejecting a bribe to kill a story in which the DRCC was accused of allegedly ordering the release of suspected hard-core criminals from Arua Central Police Station. After, unknown assailants, on two occasions, attempted to kill me. They attacked me and damaged my camera and phones.” – Fredrick Dramadri

The research established that these events left Dramadri traumatised, restless, and depressed. This prompted him to report a case of threatening violence at Arua Central Police Station against the DRCC² and to take two weeks of leave from work. On May 24, 2024, the DRCC addressed a press conference refuting Dramadri’s claims that he sent assailants to attack him. On June 5, 2024, when Dramadri returned to work from leave, he was denied access to his workstation at the station premises. It is believed that this occurred because of speaking out about the attack.

Freedom of Assembly

The research documents an incident on July 11, 2024, in which the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), one of the opposition political parties, had running battles with the police when some of the party’s leaders were in Arua City for the launch of the party’s digital membership registration exercise. The police claimed that the FDC leadership did not seek ‘*permission*’ to organise the gathering of the party members. However, after the back-and-forth exchanges, the police allowed FDC party leaders to go ahead with the launch.

The research found that whenever law enforcement agencies learnt about a planned peaceful protest in Arua, they would do whatever it took to block it. For instance, on July 25, 2024, the police and other security forces blocked a planned anti-corruption protest by youths in Arua City. The protestors had planned to join the rest of the youth across the country to deliver a petition to the Arua City Mayor protesting the rampant cases of corruption that had riddled Uganda. Consequently, the heavily armed security personnel cordoned off the Mayor’s Garden to block the protest. Any person visiting the offices of the RDC, the Mayor and technical staff of Arua City was subjected to a thorough check at the entrance.

The Right to Integrity of Person

There were reported incidents of unclear deaths in custody in prison, resulting in unlawful deprivation of the right to life. For instance, it is alleged that on September 3, 2024, Felix Afeku was brutally tortured by prison warders attached to Arua Regional Government Prison. In an interview with the brother of the deceased, Gerald Andruga who was also allegedly beaten up by the prison warders, the deceased succumbed to the torture wounds. This happened as they went to the well to fetch water after the deceased had complained of experiencing a terrible heartburn. He stated:

¹ Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda, “*Paying a painful price: A journalist’s life threatened over an organised crime story involving Deputy RCC.*” Available at: <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=9941>

² Cases were reported under SD REF 42/15/05/2024 and SD REF 31/16/05/2024

“The incident got us together with my late brother Felix at around 1 am, he woke me up complaining that he was feeling serious heartburn and that he wanted to drink some water. We had no water inside, so I escorted him to the water point which is just about 20 metres from where we stay. This is when we were arrested by the prison wardens, taken inside and they beat us severely.” – Gerald Andrug³

However, while responding to the incident, the West Nile Regional Police Commander dismissed the claims noting that the authorities were trying to rescue the deceased and the brother from being lynched by a mob who were pursuing them on allegations of theft.

Gulu City / District



Gulu District is one of the main and traditional districts in the Northern Region of Uganda. The district is the major business hub in the sub-region. Gulu District is one of the districts that were grossly affected by the war between the government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) from the 1980s to the early 2000s. To date, the district is still recovering from the impact of the war that led to the death, displacement and abduction of people in the region for over 20 years.

Freedom of Expression

Journalists and media workers in Gulu were targeted for their work. On August 29, 2024, Bosmic Otim, allegedly attacked Wilfred Tekwo, a journalist with Luo TV, an online television. The incident happened at Supremacy Lounge located along Gulu - Kampala Highway. As a result of the attack, the journalist sustained physical injuries. A case of assault was reported to Gulu Central Police Station under SD 70/29/08/2024. It is not clear if the police continued with the investigations. There was no arrest of the suspect.

On October 21, 2024, another journalist, Lil Romeo Okot was beaten up by four local government staff working with the Bargede-Layibi Division. Following a tip-off from the Gulu City Mayor, Mr Okot and other journalists went to cover a story about the Chairpersons I and II of Bargede-Layibi Division closing their offices because of unpaid dues.⁴ In an interview with the victim, it was stated that:

³ Daily Monitor, Family accuses prison warders of beating teenager to death in Arua.” Available at: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/family-accuses-prison-warders-of-beating-teenager-to-death-in-arua-4751096>

⁴ Northern Uganda Media Club, “NUMEC condemns brutal assault on journalist in Gulu City.” <https://numec.org/numec-condemns-brutal-assault-on-journalist-in-gulu-city/>

“... there were four town agents under Bargede-Layibi Division who had closed themselves in a room in fear of being attacked by those local Chairpersons; however, they managed to open the door. I picked my camera to take photos. The town agents asked me why I was taking their photo. I introduced myself as a journalist with my work ID. A town agent and a suspect in this case wanted to forcefully remove my ID, and my phone but I was quick to put them back in my pocket. In the process, I was punched in the chest 3 times and he also tore the shirt I was putting on.”

Okot reported the case of assault to Layibi Police Post under SD 11/21/10/2024. The suspect was arrested and later released on police bond.

During the trial of serious crimes in courts of law, the media was often denied access to the proceedings. This had an impact on access to information for the general public and had a chilling effect on the work of journalists and media workers in the district.

The research found that there were deliberate actions or inactions by civil servants as well as information officers to deny access to information to journalists who made repeated calls to acquire information on the administration and service delivery in the district. In an interview with one of the journalists at Rupiny Radio station, she stated:

“The challenge of access to information continues to reign even when calls have been made or laws put in place to address the vice. This has been rampant with district officials especially Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) who would promise to give detailed information after an hour or a day. But, when someone calls them again, they would not answer your (repeated) calls.”

Hoima City / District



Hoima District is one of the major districts in Bunyoro sub-region. Until early 2000s, Buliisa and Kikuube Districts were part of Greater Hoima District. Hoima is among the oil-rich districts in Uganda. It forms part of the Albertine Graben. Currently, Hoima District hosts the Central Processing Facility (CPF), the facility that will process crude oil drilled from Lake Albert. Major extractive activities are and will be carried out in the district.

Freedom of Expression

Journalists and media workers in Hoima District experienced arbitrary arrests for practicing their profession. The incidents often involved journalists and media workers who covered stories and events related to oil production. For instance, on June 3, 2024, a journalist working with Spice FM and the Uganda Broadcasting Cooperation (UBC TV) were arbitrarily arrested and detained for nearly four hours for covering a story of demolished shops and structures on a disputed land near the oil refinery land in Kayera Village, Kabaale Sub-County, Hoima District. The oil refinery project is one of Uganda's key oil projects that many investors have made investments.

There were reported incidents of threats of arbitrary arrest against journalists for capturing stories related to a dispute between the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) and a councillor from Buraru Sub-County. The journalists were forced to stop recording and warned against publishing the news. In an interview with one of the journalists who witnessed the incident, he stated:

"The two officials had a disagreement over community land rights in Buraru Sub-County where the councillor accused the RDC of conniving with land grabbers. I saw the RDC attempting to grab a gun from his bodyguard to shoot Mr Rusoke but the guard did not give him the gun. We were told never to report about the incident lest we shall be prosecuted."

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The organisers of peaceful protests are often accused by law enforcement agencies for organising or mobilising peaceful protestors to express their rights. For example, on July 23, 2024, police in Hoima City were engaged in running battles with anti-corruption protesters marching along Hoima - Kampala Highway. According to the Albertine Regional Police Spokesperson, the police were tracking one of the organisers for leading the protests.

On August 26, 2024, security operatives besieged Kitara Secondary School in Hoima District where individuals who were anti-East African Crude Oil Pipeline (anti-EACOP) project had gathered to march and present their petition to Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU).

In the petition, the protestors were asking government to stop the EACOP Project until the various human rights issues arising from the oil development projects were addressed. The research established that more than 200 protestors were besieged for more than two hours at Kitara Secondary School where they had assembled. After several interactions, security personnel later allowed only the leaders to deliver the petition under strict supervision.



Kampala District hosts Uganda's Capital City and is the country's administrative centre. Kampala District is divided into five major divisions. Being Uganda's administration centre, Kampala District is a hub of political activities. The district hosts the biggest percentage of Uganda's political parties and their head offices. Due to its location and hub of activities, the district is exposed to a range of human rights issues.

Freedom of Expression

The research revealed that freedom of expression in Kampala District could not be freely enjoyed or exercised without a heavy price tag. In the period under investigation, the research focused on digital and online expression to highlight the plight of some individuals in their attempt to express themselves. This was mainly executed through judicial persecution. The state weaponised the law to target individuals who expressed themselves using social media.

Several individuals were arrested and charged under the Computer Misuse Act, vague and repressive 'insult' laws. Some were subsequently convicted on their plea of guilty and sentenced to harsh prison terms.

The research observed incidents in which online expression that called for accountability was responded to with criminal persecution and high-handedness. The victims were mainly persons who were critical of the mismanagement of government institutions. The research noted that it became a crime to openly criticise a highly placed government official. For instance, on Tuesday, July 2, 2024, Mr Anderson Burora, the former Rubaga Division DRCC was arrested and charged with hate speech against the Speaker of Parliament under the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act, 2022. The research established that Burora used his social media accounts mainly X (formerly Twitter) to criticise the Rt. Hon. Anita Annet Among, the Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda over incompetent leadership and corruption. He was detained at Kira Division Police Station and was later remanded at Luzira Prison until he was granted Bail on July 25, 2024.

On Saturday, July 10, 2024, Edward Ahebwa, a 24-year-old TikTokker was sentenced by court to six years in jail. Ahebwa was charged under the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act, 2022 for abusing the President of Uganda Rtd. General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and his family. He was accused of sharing abusive information about the President and his family regarding increment of taxes.

Similarly, on November 19, 2024, a 27-year-old shoe hawker, Mr Juma Musuuza was arrested and remanded by Entebbe Chief Magistrate on charges of hate speech and spreading malicious information about the First Family on social media. He was also accused of making demeaning comments about the speaker of Parliament Anita Among. Musuuza was remanded until November 27, 2024.

Furthermore, on November 18, 2024, the research observed an incident in which Emmanuel Nabugodi was convicted and sentenced to two years on similar charges. Three other TikTokers remained on remand until November 25, 2024. These were David Ssengozi, Julius Tayebwa, and Isaiah Ssekagiri.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly experienced the biggest test in the period under investigation. The research found that the state and its machineries, particularly the police and the UPDF were always committed to suppressing any kind of protest, petition and demonstration in Kampala and other surrounding areas. All protests that sought to demand accountability on government expenditures, priorities, environmental protection and petitions demanding the resignation of corrupt government officials were dispersed with untold use of excessive force, arrests and detention of the organisers and participants as well as criminal prosecution by the state.

On July 2, 2024, the research observed an incident in which Fatma Nansubuga was arrested at KCCA Central Division offices and remanded to Luzira prison as she protested while holding a placard that read, *“Demanding for resignation of Speaker of Parliament. Uganda must be free from Corruption.”* Nansubuga was charged with public nuisance and remanded until July 9, 2024, when she was granted bail.

On July 23, 2024, police, the UPDF and plain-clothed security personnel rounded up over 100 peaceful protestors who had organised to march to parliament and present a petition which included seven demands from the August House, one of which was the immediate resignation of the Rt. Hon. Anita Annet Among, the Speaker of Parliament of Uganda.⁵ The participants who were mainly university students and unemployed youths were brutally arrested, detained, tortured, charged with common nuisance and remanded for over two weeks.

The research observed incidents where the state was unwilling to have any meaningful and constructive engagements with individuals who peacefully expressed intentions of petitioning government institutions on different states of affairs. The Parliament of Uganda, which symbolises civic and democratic exchange of ideas became a no-go-zone to different groups of people, including Land and Environment Defenders (LEDs).

On August 9, 2024, 47 students from different educational institutions of higher learning were arrested in Kampala as they engaged in a peaceful protest against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project. The petitioners intended to march to the Parliament of Uganda to deliver a petition opposing the project and to urge the government to sign the Fossil Free Treaty. The research established that 45

⁵ See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/march-to-parliament-seven-key-demands-by-demonstrators-4699290#story>

of these students were arrested while traveling in taxis and detained at Jinja Road Police Station. They were later released without any charges after spending 24 hours in police custody. Those who were arrested near the entry to the Parliament were held at Kampala Central Police Station. They were charged with inciting violence. On August 14, 2024, they were granted a police bond after spending five days in police custody.

The violation of freedom of peaceful assembly was also witnessed as university students attempted to peacefully challenge certain university policies. All attempts by students were rendered illegal as police teargassed, arrested and detained any student who came up to challenge what they termed as '*unfair university policies.*' On September 9, 2024, the research documented an incident in which over 10 students of Kyambogo University were arrested and detained for protesting against the 50% fees increment policy. Students indicated that the University Council passed the policy without engaging the student leadership. Regardless of their efforts to meaningfully engage the University management, their peaceful demonstration was brutally dispersed, and some participants were arrested and detained.⁶

Furthermore, the research observed and documented the use of preventive arrest as a method of managing students who wished to express their genuine grievances through peaceful demonstrations. On November 1, 2024, police unlawfully dispersed a peaceful demonstration when the students of Kyambogo University challenged the decision by the university administration to suspend guild elections on allegations of electoral violence. The research found that in this incident, 14 students were brutally arrested and detained but later released without any charges.⁷

The research found that in the period under investigation, opposition political parties faced serious backlash when police arbitrarily suspended their lawful activities. One of the parties that fell victim is Uganda's leading opposition party, the National Unity Platform (NUP) when police suspended their registration and mobilisation tours.

On September 13, 2024, during a weekly police and security press briefing held at Uganda Police Headquarters, Naguru in Kampala, police suspended the NUP mobilisation activities, citing breach of the guidelines and causing public disorder as well as inciting violence. The Deputy Inspector General of Police, Maj. Gen. Tumusiime Katsigazi stressed the mandate of the police to grant permission for mobilisation activities under Section 32 (1) of the Police Act.

Fair Trial and Due Process

In Kampala, the right to a fair hearing and due process has been a subject of abuse by state institutions entrusted with the dispensation of criminal justice. The state continually and consistently tried persons, mostly youths who attempted to call on government to account through peaceful protests with petty offences under the Penal Code Act, Cap. 120.

⁶ See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/kyambogo-students-protest-50-fees-increment-4756178>

⁷ See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/kyambogo-bosses-students-clash-over-guild-polls-4808798>

The research observed and documented incidents in which many youths who challenged the EACOP and those who stormed the streets during the March2Parliament protests were arrested, detained, tortured, presented to court and formally charged with common nuisance contrary to Section 160 of the Penal Code Act, Cap. 120.

On August 26, 2024, 21 human rights activists were arrested as they marched towards Parliament, the Head Offices of Total Energies and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC Group) in Kampala to submit a petition against the EACOP project. The research found that 20 activists were held at the Buganda Road police station before appearing in court on August 27, 2024. These were charged with “*common nuisance*” and remanded to Luzira prison until September 3, 2024.⁸

The research further noted cases of absenteeism by judicial officers, which contributed to long periods on remand for suspects of petty offences. This was witnessed on September 3, 2024, when the 20 activists were brought to court as ordered by the judicial officer while remanding them. However, the Magistrate was absent on that day. Consequently, the suspects were further detained until September 5, 2024, when they were granted bail.

The state increasingly used the military court to deny suspects of crime fair and due process as they went through the criminal justice system. The military court became a tool for political persecution for persons who were opposed to the ruling government. Delaying tactics were employed to ensure that suspects become vulnerable and succumb to pressure. This tactic was vivid in the trial of NUP supporters who were arrested in December 2020, a few weeks before the 2021 general elections.

In the case of the NUP supporters, the research established that as opposed to the constitutional dictates and criminal procedure, the right to fair trial was brokered between the suspects and the Hon. Balaam Barugahara, the State Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development in charge of Children and Youth Affairs.⁹ The strategy that the Minister explained to the media was that persons going through the military court who wished to regain their liberty would plead guilty so that they could benefit from the president’s prerogative of mercy. Indeed, on October 23, 2024, 16 NUP supporters who had been on remand for nearly five years on charges of treachery pleaded guilty. On October 23, 2024, the General Court Martial sentenced them to five years in prison.¹⁰ As predicted, on November 22, 2024, the President invoked Article 121(1)(a) and pardoned 19 NUP supporters.¹¹

Relatedly, in November 2024, state security operatives abducted Rtd. Col. Dr Kizza Besigye and Hajji Abeid Lutale Kamulegeya from Kenya and brought them to the General Court Martial, charged them with possession of firearms. The two were remanded to Luzira Maximum Prison. At the time of the research, the Research Team observed that one of the lawyers on the legal team, the Hon. Martha Wangari Karua from Kenya, had been denied a temporary licence to practise law in Uganda by the Law

⁸ See <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/uganda/uganda-crackdown-on-activists-protesting-against-large-scale-oil>

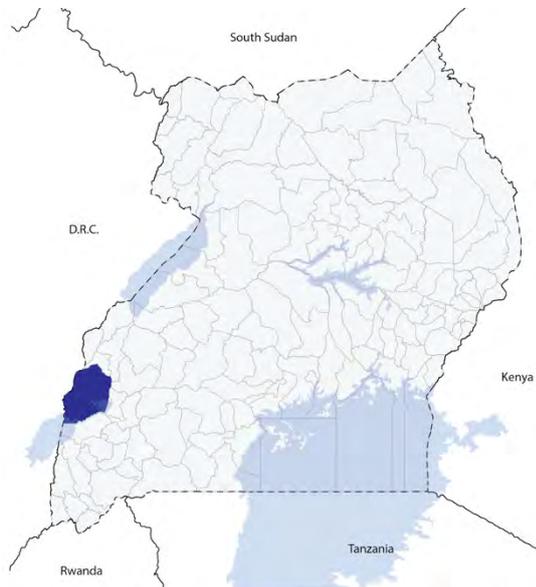
⁹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHL74oGzpp0>

¹⁰ See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/olivia-lutaaya-15-other-nup-supporters-sentenced-to-five-years-for-treachery-4800704>

¹¹ See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-pardons-19-nup-supporters-released-after-four-years-in-prison-4832728>

Council.¹² The decision by the Law Council was condemned by both the Uganda Law Society (ULS) and the Law Society of Kenya (LSK).¹³

Kasese District



Kasese District is located in Western Uganda. The district forms part of the Rwenzori sub-region and borders eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Since the late 1990s Kasese District and the entire Rwenzori sub-region has been prone to insurgencies caused by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

In June 2023, the ADF rebels attacked Lhubiriha Secondary School in Bwera in Kasese District, killing and abducting over 50 students. To date, the abductees have never been traced, notwithstanding UPDF's continued operation and pursuit of the ADF rebels inside the eastern DRC.

During the 2016 general elections, all six constituencies in Kasese District were represented by opposition Members of Parliament. On November 27, 2016, the UPDF attacked and bombed the Rwenzururu Palace. This attack led to the arrests of King Charles Mumbere Hirimangoma and over 100 royal guards and the death of over 100 people. To date, Kasese District remains a subject of political controversies and security uncertainties. Due to these factors, coupled with the existence of over three kingdoms within a kingdom, the district presents unique human rights challenges. However, serious human rights issues in the district usually arise during election periods and security operations.

The research found that the human rights situation in Kasese District was not so bad. There were very few incidents of human rights violations with less impact. This was attributed to several of human rights engagements that have brought together both duty bearers and rights holders, which have improved the situation in the area with fewer human rights concerns raised by Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and local communities. That notwithstanding, the research observed some incidents of human rights violations and abuses that are documented hereunder.

¹² See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/video/kenya-s-martha-karua-denied-license-to-practise-law-in-uganda-4851816>

¹³ See <https://www.independent.co.ug/law-society-of-kenya-threatens-retaliation-over-martha-karua/>

Freedom of Expression

The research found that there were some incidents of attacks and arbitrary arrests of journalists as they lawfully exercised their profession. The victims of these attacks were targeted as they attempted to report on critical issues such as the district budgeting process. For instance, on November 15, 2024, the research established that Kule Robert, a journalist attached to BBS TV, and Jerad Tumusiime working with Salt Media, were brutally harassed when they attempted to cover the district budgeting process at Rwenzori International Hotel in Kasese Municipality. The research noted that because of these attacks, journalists would eventually choose not to cover such events.

In an interview with one of the victims, he narrated his ordeal, stating:

“I decided to leave the coverage of the budget because I was embarrassed by a woman. This woman called me and said you are not allowed to enter the room. I went to meet other fellow journalists inside and one Adidas told me how he was treated by the very woman. Later I decided to go back at mine. My colleague who remained inside was whisked out by a counter-terrorism police officer.”

Kasese, just like other project target districts, revealed cases of arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists on trumped-up charges. These actions were intended to cause fear, intimidation, and prevent journalists from exercising their civic role of informing the public about events as they transpired in their society. The research documented an incident of an arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention of Josephat Balinandi on November 10, 2024. Balinandi, a blogger commonly known as PENZI TV AFRICA, was arrested and detained on allegations of disseminating various posts on his various social media platforms. In an interview with the research team, he stated:

“I was at my salon in Kizungu Cell, Kasese Municipality and a one Kabaka Deo came there and started slapping me. He forcefully ordered me to sit on a motorcycle that later stopped at Skyz along Crescent Street as he continued beating me seriously. In the evening of Monday 11th November 2024, he took me at Kasese Main Market Police Post where I spent a night before being transferred to Kasese CPS. At Kasese CPS, I was accused of offences under the Computer Misuse Act. I was later granted police bond.”

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The research revealed that on July 23, 2024, the youths in Kasese Municipality joined the rest of the country to protest and express their dissatisfaction, and condemn the corruption in Parliament. Their peaceful procession was prematurely dispersed when police in the district confiscated their placards. Whereas no arrests were reported, these youths could not continue engaging in these peaceful and meaningful accountability strategies. It is important to note that Kasese, being a hotspot of violence and extremism, denial of freedom of peaceful protest and the right to petition may sow seeds of hatred and violence.



Kisoro District is located in the extreme South Western Uganda. The district is bordered by the Republic of Rwanda to the south, Democratic Republic of Congo to the West, Kanungu District to the North and Rubanda District to the East.

In the period of investigation, the research in Kisoro District focused on various human rights concerns arising from the Batwa group of people. The Batwa are an indigenous group of people in Kisoro District. The population of the Batwa community in south-western Uganda is around 2,000. The Batwa settlements are scattered across the district, but the majority live adjacent to Mgahinga and Bwindi National Parks. They were evicted from their ancestral homes in the early 1990s to pave the way for the conservation of the mountain gorillas in what would later be known as Bwindi and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks. The eviction left them landless and as such, marginalised. They are disempowered, unrepresented, and unfairly treated for merely being Batwa. In this research, several human rights issues affecting the Batwa community were investigated, and the findings are enumerated hereunder.

Right to Equality and Freedom from Discrimination

Due to the marginalisation of the Batwa, who are not represented at any level in Uganda's political system and different leadership structures, they have since become victims of discrimination. The research found that the Batwa suffered from discrimination mainly in service delivery in terms of healthcare, access to justice, and education. Victims of sexual harassment who, unfortunately, contracted sexually transmitted diseases were unable to access the best healthcare because of discrimination at the health facilities, mainly from the various medical staff and the patients. In an interview with one of the HRDs in Kisoro District, it was brought to the attention of the research team that women who were infected with HIV had limited access to healthcare because they did not have the money or faced discrimination by some hospital staff and fellow patients.

Discrimination was also highlighted by respondents who indicated that whenever the Batwa reported a criminal case to the police, they would instead be referred to one of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that provide services to and work with the Batwa. The research established that criminal justice in Kisoro District was dispensed on tribal and or ethnic lines. This is because the police were swift to

arrest and detain any Mutwa (singular of Batwa) if suspected of having committed a crime. However, the same police were slow at responding to complaints brought to their attention by the Batwa. This selective application of the law by the police in Kisoro exacerbates the already existing vulnerability of the Batwa and their right to a fair trial and access to justice.

There were reported incidents of discrimination against the Batwa in the education sector in Kisoro District. This was mainly perpetrated by teachers and learners who hurled insults at the children from the Batwa families. They believed that Batwa children were so uncivilised that they did not deserve modern education. This contributed to a bigger school dropout rate of the already limited number of enrolments from the Batwa communities.

The research observed that the right to education in Kisoro District was a preserve for other ethnic groups, notwithstanding the government policy on free and universal primary and secondary education for all school-going children in the country. Stakeholders blamed the persistent discrimination against the Batwa school-going children on weak school policies and the lack of comprehensive supervision by the District Education Committee. Following the discrimination against Batwa school-going children in Kisoro District, one of the respondents informed the research team that:

“... only 10 Batwa children in Kisoro District have completed their A-Level. Even if the Batwa children go to school other children discriminate against them and they perform very poorly. There are very few that succeed in finishing school...”

The Right to Integrity of the Person

The research found that the Batwa were often inhumanely treated with no dignity by the rest of the community members. The research established that the Batwa were victims of sexual violence, and police have not taken any action against the perpetrators of these acts. Throughout the interviews with different respondents, the research found that people in Kisoro believe in the myth that *“having sex with a Mutwa woman cures backache and at some point, AIDS.”*

This myth appeared in various activity reports compiled by the Consortium members implementing the project. For instance, in the activity report for a Peer-support Network that was held in Kisoro on November 21, 2024, local HRDs in the district decried the inhumane and degrading treatment of the Batwa people for being sexually abused by the rest of the community members on grounds that sexual intercourse with them can cure their backaches.

The research further documented incidents in which the Batwa women were stripped naked for allegedly stealing cassava tubers from a resident’s cassava plantation in Kisoro District. The owner of the cassava plantation stated that he could not report the case of theft to the police because he did not expect the Batwa women to pay for the cassava they allegedly stole. He also stated that he made them walk naked to send a strong message to the other Batwa that could have similar intentions as the victims. Public nudity undermines the inherent dignity of the person, and when the research team sought a response from the police about the matter, they indicated that no complaint of public nudity had been brought to their attention.

Kitgum District



Kitgum District is located in the Northern Region and is largely occupied by the Acholi ethnic group of people. Just like her sister Gulu District, Kitgum was heavily affected by the LRA insurgencies between the 1980s and 2000s. There is a high prevalence of poverty in Kitgum District that has contributed to gender-based violence against women and girls, and high levels of school dropouts further resulting in the emergence of street kids commonly known as 'Aguu.'

The district is characterised by high levels of early marriages and teenage pregnancies, leading to a generation of child-fathers and child-mothers. Corruption by political leaders and technocrats in the district is rampant, thereby negatively affecting proper and quality service delivery and infrastructural development. The district neighbours Kidepo National Park, which has always had challenges related to wildlife conflict with the host communities, which have often led to unlawful deaths arising from attacks by wildlife. The research investigated various human rights concerns in the district, which are presented below.

The Right to Integrity of the Person

Kitgum District presented threats to the right to life, characterised by attacks by wild animals on people in the host communities of Kidepo National Park. The research documented incidents of unlawful deprivation of the right to life from wild animals such as elephants and lions. For example, on November 1, 2024, Atoo Mary, aged 48 years, who served as the Chairperson of the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) of Oryebo Primary School in Namokora Sub-County, Kitgum District was attacked and killed by an elephant. This happened when she was coming back from Oryebo Primary School where she had gone to plan for a PTA Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Even when people were not killed, residents in some parts of the district lived in fear of being attacked by the wild animals. This was witnessed on November 5, 2024, in the village of Agotagot, Deite Parish, Namokora Sub-County, which was invaded by a lion that killed a goat. As already stated, this left the people frozen and in panic, afraid for their lives and safety. Similarly, on November 7, 2024, a lion attacked the home of Latuk Margret in Guda Village, Pugoda East Parish, in Namokora Sub-County. In this incident, four goats were killed by the lion. Furthermore, a similar incident of an attack by a lion was reported in Agotagot Village.

The research observed that the increasing number of street children in Kitgum Municipality, known as *Aguu* has increased the number of murder cases, which have a direct impact on the enjoyment of the right to life and the prohibition of unlawful deprivation of the right to life.

The research documented unlawful deprivation of the right to life caused by violence among students in some schools in Kitgum District. For example, a senior five student of Kitgum Comprehensive College was allegedly beaten to death by fellow students. The research found that the deceased was beaten for speaking to a girl on his way from school in Lulojo Village in Central Division, Kitgum Municipality. Relatedly, the research documented the unlawful killing of a Senior Six student of Kitgum High School by his fellow students. The incident happened when the deceased picked a fight with his colleagues on their way from a nightclub at Gates Bar in Kitgum Municipality.

Responding to these incidents of unlawful deprivation of the right to life and threats on the right to life, the district leadership indicated that parents have neglected their parenting roles, which has led to the birth of wrong people in the town who terrorise innocent citizens. Police informed the research team that they had been able to carry out some arrests and that investigations were still ongoing. They hoped that the people involved in the crimes that put the right to life in danger would be held accountable. Police mentioned to the research team that they have intensified night patrols to arrest and detain violent street children so that people can enjoy their liberties. There was no response from the Uganda Wildlife Authority on the threats caused by wild animals in the district.

Right to Equality and Freedom from Discrimination

The right to equality and non-discrimination faced several setbacks in Kitgum District. Opportunities to occupy public offices were awarded to people based on their political inclination or affiliation. The research found that as the 2026 general elections drew closer, political favouritism became a norm in the district. As a result, there was an increase in the lack of transparency and accountability among civil and public servants in the district. In an interview with one stakeholder in the district, she stated that:

“... there is a lot of influence from the office of the Chairperson LC V, Mayor and some other key technocrats of the district. These people believe that it has to be their relatives to benefit from all the projects before looking into the competencies of all beneficiaries. As a result, most of government projects have only benefited a small section of people who are either related to the LC V, the Mayor or the technocrats. The friends of these people are also benefiting. This is done without any proper assessment. In the end, service delivery in the district is based on loyalty as opposed to patriotism and National Development Plans...”

Access to justice which is an inherent human right was also affected because of the selective application of the law by the police officers in the district. The research documented incidents in which, two police officers in Kitgum District allegedly mismanaged cases due to the refusal by parties to the case to give them a bribe of UGX 20,000. While the two officers were apprehended, their actions posed a serious risk and affected public confidence in government institutions.

Kotido District



Kotido District, part of Uganda's Karamoja sub-region, has for a long time faced challenges related to human rights abuses and violations. Despite efforts to promote peace and development, Kotido remains a hotspot for widespread violations, primarily due to entrenched cultural practices and political patronage. The district, still reliant on informal justice mechanisms such as "an eye for an eye," has seen a spike in reported human rights abuses, perpetuated through a combination of impunity and political interference.

The Right to Integrity of the Person

Respect for the right to life in Kotido District was on critical trial in this reporting period. There were unlawful killings resulting from mistrust and gun violence. On September 14, 2024, Mr Lokaino Mauro, the LC3 Chairperson of Kotido Sub-County, was fatally shot by an unknown assailant at his residence in Lokitela Ebu Trading Centre. The research discovered that the assailant, armed with an AK-47 rifle, was later found dead, reportedly killed by the UPDF during their search. Mr Lokaino's death was linked to his opposition to selling communal land to the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), a move allegedly supported by certain district leaders. Lokaino had also been accused of working with both the UPDF and local warriors, raising suspicions of double-dealing, which may have contributed to his assassination.

Even when suspicious killings took place in the district, there were no proper investigations and prosecutions. The UPDF would search and immediately kill the alleged suspect. For example, following Lokaino's murder, the UPDF quickly located the alleged assassin, who had a military-issued gun and ammunition. Instead of taking him through proper criminal justice procedures, the UPDF shot him on the spot.

The killing of civilians by UPDF officials became a normal practice, even without any clear reasons. At some point, UPDF justified the killing of civilians by accusing them of attacking military officials in an attempt to steal their guns. On November 1, 2024, Dedeng James was fatally shot by UPDF soldiers from Karenga barracks in Napotipot Village while visiting his sister, Nakong Jennifer. His sister, Namongo Magdale, and father, Lopua Joseph, received notification of his death early that morning and travelled from Kaabong to verify the incident. Upon arrival, they discovered Dedeng's body lying in a pool of blood outside Jennifer's residence, with witnesses alleging that a family member, Namele Paska, may have influenced the soldiers to kill him.

According to the UPDF officials, Dedeng was shot for attempting to seize a gun from a soldier. Following his death, the UPDF conducted a hasty burial, disregarding the family's traditional rites. Days later, soldiers returned with limited provisions (posho and beans) for the grieving family. However, efforts to seek justice were thwarted when the UPDF officers confiscated the police case file, promising an internal investigation without further updates.

The research established that there were cases of torture resulting from excessive use of force by UPDF officials as they were tracing stolen livestock. In most cases, the force from the UPDF officials was disproportionate to the risks posed by the civilians. Due to the excessive force and use of firearms to respond to threats posed by the residents, the research documented incidents of bodily injuries.

For instance, on October 16, 2024, an incident involving UPDF soldiers from the Lolelia Detachment reportedly resulted in the shooting of a young man in Moru Alokoto Kraal. The research in-depth investigation into the incident indicated that the soldiers, accompanied by Local Defence Units (LDUs) and members of the Dodoth community, were tracking stolen livestock from Kaabong District. When they reached Alokoto Kraal, a dispute erupted over suspicion that the UPDF soldiers intended to confiscate animals from Kraal's residence, instead of following the original tracks of the stolen livestock.

As tensions escalated, the UPDF commander and his unit allegedly opened fire on Kraal's family members, injuring Peter, who sustained a gunshot wound on his left leg. After the incident, Peter was taken to Kacheri Health Centre III by a boda-boda (motorcycle taxi) operator for initial treatment. The survivor was later transferred to Kotido Health Centre IV for further care. His family incurred significant travel expenses in arranging his transport and medical care.

Furthermore, the research established incidents of torture and cruel treatment meted out to civilians regardless of their gender. Even complainants who made attempts to report criminal cases at the police stations were not spared by the perpetrators.

On November 7, 2024, a lady was allegedly subjected to torture by police officers at Kotido Central Police Station after reporting a case of theft. To her surprise, she was instead detained for allegedly assaulting the accused. The research found that when the lady attempted to explain, she was physically restrained and reportedly beaten by three policemen and a policewoman.

Relatedly, on October 1, 2024, a 20-year-old secondary school student who was detained on suspicion of stealing a CCTV camera from the school was reportedly subjected to beatings and left bleeding in his cell. He was also detained beyond the 48-hour legal limit for detention.

Right to Personal Liberty

The Karamoja Disarmament Program in Kotido District which is implemented through the cordon and search operations has had an overarching impact on the right to liberty and security of the person. The research found that people have been held incommunicado during which they are subjected to harrowing torture and inhumane treatment. For example, a local blogger and freelance journalist known as "*The Karimojong*," who has been documenting human rights violations related to government disarmament efforts in Kotido has uncovered reports of severe torture.

The incidents reveal experiences where men were tied by their private parts on trees in an attempt to coerce them into revealing the locations of hidden firearms. Survivors of these horrific acts are often left impotent and deeply traumatised. The blogger has also exposed the existence of mass graves in Lomukura, Nakapelemoru, and Napumpum sub-counties, where it is suspected that many of the individuals arrested during security operations were secretly buried. Some families remain unaware of their loved ones' fate, believing they are still detained in prisons across Uganda.

Kween District



Kween District located in the Eastern Region of Uganda forms part of the Sebei sub-region. The district hosts a better part of Mt. Elgon National Park which has been an area of contention between the government under the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the Benet community.

Traditionally, the Benet community resided in Mt. Elgon National Park until the 1980s when they were resettled in the neighbouring areas of Kapchorwa. Since their resettlement, there have been continued cases of dissatisfaction leading to various human rights concerns that the government has yet to address. In this report, the research focused on the right to life in light of the relationship between UWA and the Benet community. The research highlighted incidents of extrajudicial killings of mainly minors of as low as 13 years.

The Right to Integrity of the Person

The research found that due to the wildlife conflict, there were reported incidents of extrajudicial killings of civilians by officials from the UWA. That notwithstanding, there were no efforts to hold the perpetrators accountable. The research established that the killings were caused by excessive use of force against community members who did not pose any serious risks to UWA officials. Mostly, the victims were young teenagers aged about 13 years.

The research documented an incident in July 2024 where a 15-year-old student became a victim in the ongoing conflict between the community around Mt. Elgon National Park and UWA. The boy was allegedly shot dead by UWA rangers while cutting grass for his family's livestock.

Similarly, on September 6, 2024, a tragic incident occurred when 13-year-old Joshua Emmanuel Sukuku was shot and killed while collecting firewood from a protected area. The UWA officials killed the young boy in total disregard for the fact that collecting firewood from a protected area is not an offence. Even if it was an offence, they ought to have arrested the boy and filed formal charges against him. The research found that on that same day, several others, including Joshua's brother, were injured in similar incidents. The lack of accountability in such cases has inculcated a culture of impunity among UWA officials who can kill at liberty.

The research observed that the actions by UWA officials posed threats to the enjoyment of the right to life even in situations that did not directly lead to the death of persons belonging to the Benet Community. The research documented incidents in which UWA destroyed crops worth millions in Tuikat Sub-County, Kween District, affecting over 100 farmers. The crops that were destroyed included maize, Irish potatoes, vegetables, and trees. Suffice to note that these are the sources of both livelihood and household income for the Benet community. The farmers demanded compensation, clear boundary marks, and a site visit by relevant authorities. These demands were not given any attention until August when a dialogue was held although no action was taken.¹⁴

Mbale City / District



Mbale District located in the Eastern Region of Uganda forms part of the Bugisu sub-region. In July 2020, Mbale attained city status. Given its strategic location and historical economic development, Mbale District is one of the main business centres in the Eastern Region.

Freedom of Expression

The research revealed cases of attacks, intimidation and low pay for journalists and media workers in Mbale District. The review of activity reports and reports from the Human Rights Monitor (HRM) in Mbale District pointed to the fact that journalists, especially those involved in investigative journalism

¹⁴ See <https://benayahtimes.com/2024/08/11/uwa-destroys-crops-worth-millions-in-kween-district-farmers-demand-compensation-and-action/>

particularly on service delivery in the district expressed concerns about attacks and intimidation in the course of doing their work.

The journalists in Mbale District have to navigate a lot of hurdles before they get the information. Unfortunately, even after the information has been published, their safety is not guaranteed. These journalists were always traced and were under surveillance by state security operatives. Some journalists reported incidents of house break-ins at their residences in which their work gadgets such as cameras and phones were forcefully taken by security operatives. These incidents were rampant when journalists reported on accountability and provision of quality services, especially in the health care system in Mbale District.

The research further established that radio presenters and news reporters find it hard to present on and report about contentious political matters in the district. Most radio stations in the district are owned by politicians and mainly from the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM). The proprietors of the radio stations in the district continued to determine the nature of discourses on various radio stations. Most journalists were threatened with suspensions among other disciplinary actions as well as termination of their contracts and summary dismissals. This kept journalists in a state of fear and in check for any behaviour that was considered unbecoming by their bosses.

Journalists also raised an issue of long periods of working without pay and inadequate payment for the work they do. The research found that some radio stations pay up to UGX 1,000 to news reporters for each news story. According to the journalists, this left most of them very vulnerable thereby jeopardising their ethical integrity. This is because it became easier for politicians to compromise the already vulnerable journalists to influence public discourse and narratives around human rights, the rule of law and accountability in the district.

Moroto District



Moroto District is located in the north-eastern part of Uganda and forms part of the Karamoja sub-region. The district is mainly occupied by the Matheniko tribe. The main economic activity of the Matheniko is pastoralism and cattle keeping.

The human rights concerns in the district were not any different from those highlighted in its sister district of Kotido. These concerns were attributed to various factors which include but not limited to the government disarmament programme, cattle rustling and poverty as well as marginalisation. Through focus group discussions, research interested itself in issues related to the right to life, right to liberty, freedom from torture, fair trial and due process rights. These are discussed hereunder:

The Right to Integrity of the Person

The right to life in the district was under threat as a result of persistent gun violence and extrajudicial killings by the UPDF officials during the cordon and search operations. The research engaged with the stakeholders in the district who were concerned about the increasing gun violence that unlawfully deprived many individuals of their right to life. Gun violence in the district was perpetrated by the Karamojong warriors who raided many communities, mainly those with huge numbers of cattle, goats and sheep.

Whoever resisted the Karamojong warriors risked facing death, and, indeed many people were killed. The respondents revealed that the state tried to address these concerns, but failed to decisively eliminate them. To their dismay, people continued to be unlawfully deprived of their lives by the Karamojong warriors who raided their cattle, among other items, thereby depriving them of their property and means of livelihood.

During the focus group discussions, both HRDs and journalists revealed that there were cases of killings by shooting orchestrated by UPDF officials. This was normally done during the cordon and search operations that were conducted at night on people suspected of having guns. It was indicated that whereas such operations were supposed to be peaceful, oftentimes, there were cases of excessive use of force by the UPDF officials, which resulted in killings of persons who were sometimes innocent.

Furthermore, during the focus group discussions, the research team was informed about the existence of '*mass graves*' in some barracks where people who die in detention are buried. This was commonly done in army barracks where ordinary citizens had no access. When asked about the justification for the use of force, participants indicated that UPDF officials always say that they use force in self-defence because of the threats posed by the Karamojong warriors. The challenge raised during the discussion was the failure of the UPDF to distinguish the Karamojong warriors from the innocent ordinary citizens. Also challenging was the issue of accountability for the innocent lives that were unlawfully deprived of their right to life.

Wildlife conflict was also another concern that contributed to unlawful deprivation of the right to life. This was mainly affected by communities neighbouring Kidepo National Park. During the discussions, participants indicated that there were numerous killings arising from the conflicts between host communities trying to graze their cattle in the National Park Reserve areas or collecting firewood and sometimes poaching. According to the participants, the killings were always justified on grounds that it was illegal to encroach on protected national park reserves. People were also concerned that sometimes wild animals encroached on their land and destroyed their crops as well as killing people in the communities. One of the participants reacting to these incidents stated that:

“...it seems fine when wild animals destroy people’s property and kill people as opposed to when local community members kill or when they encroach on the National Park Reserve. Just like the killings during the cordon and search operations, these wildlife killings are unaccounted for and the perpetrators continue to commit more violations on the right to life.”

The research documented incidents of torture meted on suspects during the cordon and search operations in the district. During the focus group discussions, participants stated that people who returned from military detention facilities had visible torture marks. They decried the poor conditions of detention, including little or no food, congestion and long periods of detention. Claims of continual beatings while in detention were also discussed during the sessions.

In our interview with the HRM in Moroto District, he stated:

“Detainees have recounted experiences of physical and psychological abuse aimed at extracting confessions or punishing alleged offenders. These practices are a severe violation of human rights and dignity.”

The research established that torture and inhumane treatment are still rampant in the district. Participants stated that sometimes when someone was arrested or killed, they would be driven around major towns in the district to show the rest of the members of the public what had happened but also to send a stern warning on what would befall them if they ever dared to be part of such groups.

Right to Personal Liberty

The research established cases in the district where the right to liberty was grossly violated. There were reported cases of individuals who were arrested and kept out of the protection of the law and have never appeared. The respondents to our research indicated that it was hard to know if such people would ever appear again. The longest case of disappearance is in 2019. During the focus group discussions, participants stated that before claiming that someone had disappeared, efforts were always made to search various detention centres such as police, prisons and army barracks.

However, it has always been hard to locate people who have previously been arrested. They have never been brought to court. Their families could not ascertain the fate of their detained relatives. Participants raised concerns that such people who have disappeared could have been killed and buried in the ‘mass graves’ that are evident in most army barracks in the district.

The research further established that there were numerous cases of arbitrary arrests and prolonged detentions without trial. Security forces often detained individuals on suspicion of involvement in criminal activities without sufficient evidence or legal justification. Many detainees reported being held in inhumane conditions.

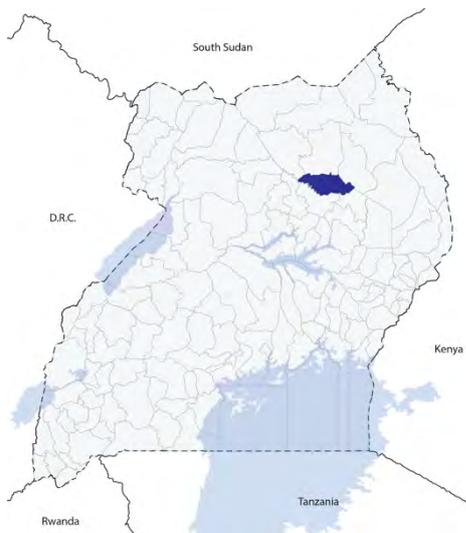
Fair Trial and Due Process Rights

Most suspects of cattle rustling and gun violence were always tried under the martial law in the Field Court Martial. They were never taken to civil court, regardless of being civilians. During the focus group

discussions, participants were sceptical of the quality of justice one could expect from a court martial. One of the participants commenting on the trial of civilians in the Field Court Martial stated:

“The procedures in the adjudication of cases and intimidation by the Military Courts is immense. Persons arrested should be arraigned before civilian courts and allow proper criminal procedures to dictate the entire criminal justice system as seen in other districts. We see selective application of Martial Law against the Karamojong. The issue being that people from other regions have also possessed guns but are rarely subjected to Martial Law.”

Otuke District



Otuke District forms part of the Lango sub-region in Northern Uganda. Over the past years, the district has been prone to attacks from the cattle rustlers mainly from the Karamojong Warriors.

Freedom of Expression

The research established that freedom of expression in Otuke District remained under significant threat. A pervasive culture of fear discouraged citizens from freely sharing information, particularly on sensitive topics. Journalists, especially those covering controversial issues, faced intimidation from local authorities, including the police and the office of the RDC, which restricted access to information and reduced transparency.

The research found that on August 14, 2024, journalists attempted to investigate the murder of a local businessman, a tragedy that had caused widespread concern. Despite efforts to gather details, reporters were met with resistance. Local authorities refused to share information, citing ongoing security concerns. Commenting on the incident, one of the journalists in the region stated that:

“... journalists from a regional newspaper were threatened with arrest when they persisted. The RDC’s office later accused the media of spreading misinformation, further stifling the press and public discourse.”

Furthermore, the research documented incidents in which journalists were denied access to community engagements from where they would get news to disseminate to members of the public. On October 15, 2024, a journalist from a local radio station was denied access to a community dialogue

on land disputes in Ogwette Sub-County. While the authorities cited security concerns, the larger context of public concern over the floods made it clear that there was a deliberate attempt to control the narrative on local governance issues. This incident illustrated the broader trend of restricted press freedom during a time when transparency is vital.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The right to assemble in Otuke District was tightly controlled. Public gatherings were often dispersed, authorities citing security concerns as the justification. Citizens attempting to organise protests against local government policies, such as land management and public service, were frequently met with police crackdowns.

On August 3, 2024, a protest by a local community dissatisfied with land compensation for a government road project was forcefully dispersed. The community alleged insufficient consultation and delays in compensation. Police intervened, dispersing the gathering and arresting several protesters, accusing them of inciting violence.

In September 2024, a community-based organisation (CBO) dedicated to youth civic education was denied permission to hold a community outreach event. Despite complying with all legal requirements, the event, which aimed to educate citizens on their voting rights, was indefinitely suspended due to alleged security concerns. The district authorities discouraged the CBO from holding similar events in the future without prior clearance from the police and other security agencies.

On October 20, 2024, residents of Olilim Town Council attempted to organise a peaceful protest demanding prompt repairs of the road following the floods in the area due to heavy rains. The protest was unlawfully dispersed by the police who cited failure of the organisers to seek “*permission.*” A number of arrests were made by police and several participants in the protest were detained for a couple of days. They were charged with the offence of unlawful assembly. The research found that such acts by the police created fear and as a result, residents could not make any other attempt to demand better services in Olilim Town Council and Otuke District as a whole.

Freedom of Association

CSOs and CBOs in Otuke District continued to operate under restrictive conditions. Many organisations, especially those known to be critical of government policies, encountered bureaucratic delays when seeking registration or event permits. District authorities displayed suspicion toward these organisations, which hindered their ability to engage effectively in civic and community activities.

A women’s empowerment group in Orum Sub-County, which had planned a workshop on gender-based violence, was unable to proceed due to delays in obtaining clearance from district authorities. The authorities gave no clear reason for the cancellation, but it was widely understood that the tensions surrounding the effects of the floods and the difficulty of organising public events in a flooded area led to the unfortunate cancellation. This was particularly frustrating for the group, which was working to address rising concerns of domestic violence amid the floods.

Wakiso District



Wakiso District is located in Central Uganda. The district was carved out of Kampala and Mpigi Districts with the aim of improving service delivery. Wakiso District is a hub of political activities. It is one of the country's opposition strongholds. Its location in the Central Region and its various political activities expose it to unique human rights challenges.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression was under threat in the period under investigation following the mass eviction in Lubigi by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA). The research documented incidents where journalists who sought to report about the evictions faced threats and intimidation. As a result, some journalists decided to record the incidents of the eviction in Lubigi at night because it was easier to hide from those who were intimidating them.

The research documented incidents where the state weaponised the law to stifle digital expression. For instance, on November 13, 2024, Emmanuel Nabugodi, a TikToker was remanded to Kigo Prison on charges of hate speech contrary to Section 26 (1)(a) of the Computer Misuse Act (as amended), 2022 and spreading malicious information contrary to Section 28(1) and 2 of the same Act. Whereas the TikToker assumed he was simply creating content and expressing himself in a comic way to impress his online followers, the police did not find his content funny. When he learnt that the police were looking for him, he went into hiding on September 2024. However, the police tracked him down and arrested him in Mbale District.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration continued to be violated by state security operatives. The research found that residents and HRDs were never allowed to enjoy the freedom of assembly mainly through peaceful protests calling for accountability. For instance, following the evictions in Lubigi, individuals who attempted to peacefully demonstrate and challenge the eviction were dispersed with tear gas and other riot control tools. The research documented incidents where persons who attempted to protest the Lubigi land eviction were injured with tear gas canisters and rubber bullets. Unlawful measures were also deployed to disperse or create fear among the demonstrators.

For instance, police used preventive arrests of organisers of the protests and some local leaders, which were made days prior to the demonstrations. This approach used by law enforcement agencies scared away community members from exercising their freedom of peaceful assembly.

The research observed that these actions by the police had an impact on the involvement of youths in subsequent peaceful protests such as the March2Parliament protests of July 2024. Most youths in Wakiso District did not exercise their right to peacefully demonstrate in their home district. Instead, they joined their colleagues in Kampala while others chose to remain indoors.

Freedom of Association

In the period of investigation, the right to freedom of association was one of the rights that was abused in Wakiso District. Whereas the district under the District Community Development Office has theoretically set a fee for NGOs and CBOs at different levels to pay for certificates and clearances to conduct their businesses smoothly in the district, the practice is different. The research established that some of the NGOs were left constrained by the overriding registration dynamics. The research found that because of these multiple registration requirements, Mirror Women and Children Foundation have since abandoned some of the processes like securing a memorandum of understanding with the district since it could not raise the money that was requested from them. During interactions with the organisation, it was established that they were able to raise UGX 400,000 out of the UGX 1,000,000 that was requested from them.

Similarly, the research found that the District NGO Monitoring Department loses files under unclear circumstances. Some organisations had to involve the Wakiso District Human Rights Committee (WDHRC) to help them to trace the files. For instance, Alliance of Women Advocating for Change (AWAC) was frustrated by the District Community Development Office until they engaged WDHRC to successfully trace their file and an MoU was signed with the district whilst being labelled as “one that had eaten alone.”

Furthermore, the research found that in August 2024, there were unreasonable delays in signing the MoU between Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET) and Wakiso District Local Government occasioned by the office of the District Community Development Office. In an interview with WDHRC, it was later found that the MoU was already signed but were wondering why the office in question did not share the MoU with UGANET.

Regarding these delays and bureaucratic tendencies, WDHRC intimated:

‘The Committee continues to push to ensure that the MoU is delivered to the intended parties though the office in question wants an inception meeting to be undertaken before the MoU is shared. This has in turn delayed implementation of project activities within the district by UGANET.’

Freedom of association in Wakiso district continued to be abused by cultural and religious beliefs. This mainly affected organisations that work with and provide services to marginalised groups of people. These organisations have gone through smear campaigns referring to them as promoters of Western

imperialism and doing ungodly acts. Representatives of these groups of people and staff of organisations that work with them are not accorded the dignity they deserve even during meetings.

In an interview with one of the victims, they stated that:

'... in one of the meetings we attended at the district in August, some district heads kept on wondering how the representatives (we) were raised and kept making fun of us. We eventually felt out of place and we could not clearly express ourselves due to such attitudes.'