



12th August, 2016

Press Statement

Uganda: Police should adequately protect officers of the Court.

The Uganda Police Force (UPF) must preserve the sanctity of the Courts of Law and ensure that judicial officers and lawyers are protected in the course of their duties, said the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Uganda (NCHRD-U), Chapter Four Uganda, Defend Defenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) and the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI) in a joint statement today.

On 10 August 2016, lawyers representing petitioners in a case against the Inspector General of Police (IGP) and seven senior police officers were attacked by a mob at the Chief Magistrates Court in Makindye, Kampala. The IGP and other police officers were expected in Court to answer to charges of torture arising out of alleged police brutality towards supporters of opposition leader Dr. Kizza Besigye on 13 and 14 July.

Protestors supporting the IGP forced their way into the courthouse and besieged the Chambers of the Chief Magistrate where he, along with several lawyers representing the complainants, were forced to take refuge. Despite heavy deployment by the UPF, police officers failed to take appropriate action to restrain the crowd. Only when the physical safety of the lawyers was threatened did police officers provide them with protection as they were escorted from the premises.

The seemingly “unbothered” conduct of the police at the destructive behavior of the protestors is a clear abdication of the UPF’s duty to ensure public safety for all Ugandans. Article 20 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda requires all organs and agencies of government to respect, uphold and protect the rights and freedoms of all individuals and groups.

“Police agencies should in all circumstances respect the rights of individuals while enforcing the law. If they fail to do so, they must be held accountable for their actions,” said Brenda Kugonza, National Coordinator of the NCHRD-U.

“The right to peacefully assemble and protest is universal. However, the UPF’s failure to act appropriately as the mob interfered with court proceedings is symbolic of the continued selective application of the 2013 Public Order Management Act,” said Hassan Shire, Executive Director of Defend Defenders. “While the UPF has been quick to break up lawful and peaceful assemblies in other instances, it was reluctant to intervene as a rowdy crowd threatened to beat up officers of the court. The police should apply the law equally and appropriately, even if the subject is one of their own.”

According to Articles 16 to 18 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, the State should guarantee the functioning of lawyers. The Ugandan Government should adhere to these principles and ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they must be

adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

“The UPF’s stance as a rowdy crowd threatened officers of court is not only a threat to the rule of law in Uganda, but also a hindrance to the progress of defending human rights and dispensation of justice in the country,” said Sheila Muwanga, Deputy Director of FHRI.

Our organizations call on the Ugandan government to:

- Ensure the protection of officers of court while they undertake their duties;
- Respect the rule of law in accordance with national and international legal standards;
- Investigate and identify the circumstances behind the harassment, intimidation and obstruction of the 10th August Court proceedings and take appropriate action.

For further information, please contact

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