**Uganda**

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**Union**



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**WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY MESSAGE**

**UGANDA: REPRESSION, ARRESTS, DETENTION AND EXPLOITATION OF JOURNALISTS**

**KAMPALA – SUNDAY – MAY 3 - 2020**

 Ugandan journalists join rest of the world in celebrating this year’s World Press Freedom Day (WPFD) under the theme :” Journalism without fear or favour”. Uganda Journalists Union (UJU) congratulates media practitioners on marking this day despite the forced lockdown due to Covid – 19 pandemic. .

Ugandan journalists have continued to work under pathetic conditions with repression from, security agencies, assault, torture, confiscation and destruction of journalists’ equipment ,is order of the day.

Critical journalists especially those from upcountry are continuously being harassed and intimidated by local authorities and Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) and some media practitioners are arrested on flimsy charges while others are detained sometimes incommunicado.

**DRAGONIAN MEDIA LAWS**

Journalists still face threats from draconian laws being preferred against them like “ Offensive Communication”, “Sedition”, “ Libel”, “Defamation” “Incitement” and “Sectarianism”.

.Uganda Journalists Union considers continued attacks on the journalists especially those who cover Politics, corruption and human rights violations, as blatant efforts to systematically suppress critical reporting, stifle voices of dissent and undermine journalists\ rights to report independently and objectively using a multiplicity of sources at their disposal. In the end journalists are gagged hence complete muzzling of media freedom in the country.

**EXPLOITATION OF JOURNALISTS**

Journalists in Uganda are continuing to be exploited by Media Owners or Proprietors who have taken advantage of absence of a Minimum Wage to violate journalists’ Labour Rights with impunity. Journalists who fall under the Freelance category are hired and fired verbally with no Employment Contracts, no Appointment Letters and are overworked like donkeys before being paid peanuts. Staff journalists are duped or subjected into signing unrealistic Employment Contracts.

Interference by Government and Advertising Companies has impacted adversely on Editorial Independence of media houses that must compromise objectivity in news reporting in exchange for advertising revenue.

**POLICE FAILS PROSECUTE KILLERS OF FIVE JOURNALISTS**

Uganda Police has failed to apprehend and prosecute culprits who murdered five journalists in the country. A Rwandan exiled journalist and Editor at***Inyenyeri*** News Website was on December 2, 2011 shot dead in a Kampala restaurant.

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Mupaghasya Community Television,( Kasese) journalist Amon Thembo “Wa Mupaghasya” was shot dead on May 12, 2012 and up to now Police has never prosecuted the killers.

 Masaka – based Top Radio and Television Correspondent Paul Kiggundu ,was on September 10, 2010 beaten to death by rowdy motorcycle taxi operators after he filmed them setting ablaze a house of their colleague.

Prime Radio News Reporter and Presenter Dickson Ssentongo was on September 13, 2010 clobbered to death by metal wielding assailants. The New Vision newspaper News reporter Thomas Pere was on June 16, 2013 murdered and his body dumped on road side.

**PENDING CASES OF TORTURE**

There are a number of cases filed by journalists in courts of law with some being settled out of court . However major cases of torture have never been resolved as the journalists who were tortured and escaped death by a whisker continue to be frustrated..

Former News Reporter at the Razer newspaper and Chinese Xinhua agency Stringer Julius Odeke escaped death narrowly after a Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) soldier shot at him tearing through his stomach . He was hospitalized for over two yeasr as he recovered from the injuries. His case against the Uganda Attorney General has since been frustrated with little hope of getting justice.

In 2015 WBS Television journalists Andrew Lwanga was assaulted by a Senior Police Officer while covering a group of young Ugandans who were protesting against unemployment in the country. Mr Lwanga suffered a broken spin with other multiple injuries. He has since been crippled and forced out of the job. His case remains unresolved in courts of law as he is frustrated by the authorities.

In 2018 several journalists were beaten, tortured and detained during by elections in Bugiri and Arua plus unrest in Kampala. However the widely publicised act of torture by the army was on August 20, 2018 on Reuters Stringer James Akena. He was clobbered like a snake and forced out of the job with severe injuries inflicted on him. There are several journalists who have been tortured and their equipment confiscated or destroyed by security agencies but fear coming out in the open to complain.

Uganda Journalists Union calls on the government to compensate all journalists who have been tortured and their equipment destroyed, and to stop security agencies from directing repression on the journalists.

Police should investigate all cases of journalists killed, apprehend the culprits and prosecute them in courts of law because we believe justice delayed is justice denied. All security operatives especially the army and the police who commit crimes against journalists should individually be held liable, arrested and prosecuted in courts of law.

Ugandan Legislators should fast track enactment of a Minimum Wage that should end afflictions of journalists and to introduce a law on ***Crimes committed against journalists*** since Police has a “Media Crimes Unit”, the two could be complimentary and serve both parties.

As we ask for more freedom, protection and safety, media practitioners should also practice ethical and responsible journalism that promotes Transparency, Accountability, Democracy, Human Rights and Good Governance in the country.

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