



## For Immediate Release

Uganda: NCHRD-U condemns the continuous unabated threats, abuse and physical attacks towards Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) within the media fraternity.

*“When an individual is protesting society's refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a human being, his very act of protest confers dignity on him”.*

*Bayard Rustin -Civil Rights Activist (1912–1987)*

(Kampala, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018) The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (NCHRD-U) wishes to condemn in the strongest terms the continuous unabated attacks on our members specifically from the media fraternity by all sorts of state and non-state actors.

For the benefit of new comers, it is important to explain who a human rights defender (HRD) is; or what it constitutes to be labelled so:

A human rights defender is an individual acting in his or her own capacity or under any organisation or in association with others, does acts or actions that contribute or lead to the protection and promotion of human rights in a peaceful manner. Examples of such actions may include speaking on the situation of human rights at any one time, assisting citizens to access justice, writing articles on human rights, creating awareness or informing the citizenry about their rights and responsibilities, speaking out against evils that affect the realisation of human rights in society such as bad governance, impunity, corruption, nepotism, sectarianism, poor service delivery, unemployment and all such other acts that could constitute bad governance etc. Human rights defenders derive their legitimacy and the right and freedom to do such work from the *Constitution of the Republic of Uganda* under *Article 38* that provides for civic rights and activities hence:

- *Every Ugandan citizen has the right to participate in the affairs of government, individually or through his or her representatives in accordance with the law.*

- *Every Ugandan has a right to participate in peaceful activities to influence the policies of government through civic organisations.*

The Coalition notes that it has now become a culture for all sorts of persons (be it state and non-state actors) to attack journalists while on the call of duty to gather news and information for the public and only to be subjected to all sorts and manner of attack ranging from harassment, intimidation, verbal threats, physical attacks, abductions, torture, confiscation and destruction of their tools of trade such as cameras and notes.

In May 2017, in their most recent report, our partners Human Rights Network for Journalists (HRNJ) released their annual press freedom index entitled "*Critical Journalism under Attack*" that decried the escalating trend in the continued attacks towards journalists. The report profiled 113 cases of abuse and violations of journalists' rights. At the heel of these attacks is the Uganda Police Force which was implicated in 83 cases.

In our own report on the *situation of HRDs in Uganda towards Uganda's Periodic Review in 2016 at the Human Rights Council*, we flagged out the issue of continued attacks on journalists as HRDs and asked peer states to ask the Government of Uganda to hold perpetrators accountable towards violations against Journalists particularly following the 2016 general election which hasn't occurred to-date. Electoral periods are of particular concern and the coalition notes with deep concern and utmost shame, the brutality meted out to a Bukedde TV Journalist Mr. Wisely Damba who was covering the hugely contested By-Election in Sheema municipality that pitted the NRM candidate and a Senior cabinet minister against the FDC candidate Ms. Virginia Plan Mugenyi. It was reported that on the 27th July, 2018 he was violently assaulted by supporters bent to the Hon. Elioda Tumwesigye's side and temporarily held at the latter's NGO ICOBI while members of the Police force and other private security personnel stood akimbo looking on!

The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders takes exception with the continued targeting of Journalists and ultimately stifling their right to practice their profession and exercise freedom of expression during the course of their legitimate work.

As a Coalition whose mission is to protect and promote the work of HRDs in a safe and secure environment, we wish to remind both the state and non- state actors to refrain from the continuous violations and abuses targeting our members. We further urge all state actors especially the Police and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions to live up to their obligation of respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. We demand that the police leadership through its various disciplinary structures to conclusively investigate cases relating to the attacks on the media and have the perpetrators held accountable.

"It is also high time that Parliament considers, as matter of priority, having a specific law to protect human rights defenders as a special category of people in our society, "said

Robert Kirenga, Executive Director of the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders- Uganda, and this is simply because the noble work they do, not only impacts your constituency but equally affects you in one way or another as an individual.”

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