



May 24, 2016

President Yoweri Museveni
The State House of Uganda
P.O. Box 25497
Kampala
UGANDA

Your Excellency,

Petition

The undersigned organisations that are members of the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) network, write to express grave concern about the deteriorating freedom of expression (FoE) situation and the abuse of the right to freedom of assembly, among other democratic rights, by security forces and national regulatory bodies in Uganda.

We are particularly concerned about the persistent attacks on local and international media professionals, opposition leaders and supporters, human rights activists and the blockage of social media platforms during the country's electioneering period and other important national events.

On May 6, 2016, a week before your swearing in ceremony, the Minister for Information and National Guidance, Jim Katugugu Muhwezi, [banned media coverage](#) of activities of the opposition's 'defiance campaign' spearheaded by the flag bearer of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Kizza Besigye.

On May 11, a day before your swearing in, the [Ugandan police arrested two journalists](#), shot and injured a *Channel 44* TV reporter covering a demonstration organised by the FDC to contest the swearing in. Meanwhile, army officers were also reported to have caned a female journalist who was covering the same story.

On the same day, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), the state communications regulator, ordered service providers to block social media platforms until after the swearing in ceremony.

This is the second time in three months that social media platforms have been censored in the country during important national events.

There have been [several appeals](#) from international and local human rights bodies, including AFEX, urging you, Mr. President, as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, to call to order the Ugandan

police and security forces who have been the main perpetrators of these violations against Ugandan citizens, human rights activists and journalists.

Given the critical role the media plays in fostering good governance and democracy, it is imperative that they are allowed to carry out their duties freely without any form of interference. Attacks on the media, such as arbitrary arrests, physical attacks, threats, among others, nurture self-censorship which is dangerous for every growing democracy.

Nevertheless, the free expression and freedom of assembly situation in Uganda, among other democratic rights seem to be deteriorating in terms of numbers and magnitude this year in Uganda particularly during important national events. There have been 23 recorded incidents of freedom of expression violations in Uganda between January and April 2016.

In January, five (5) incidents of violations were recorded. There were four (4) incidents of arbitrary arrests by the police against journalists and one incident of a police officer threatening to shoot four journalists who were covering a story.

In February 2016 (election month), 12 violations were recorded. There were three (3) reported cases of arbitrary arrests; four (4) cases of assault were recorded. A police in civilian clothes [pepper sprayed](#) a photo journalist working with AFP, an international news agency while he was covering Besigye's arrest at Kasaganti. When other journalists demanded that the Division Police Commander, James Kawalya reveals the identity of the police officer who assaulted the photo journalist, he refused and [threatened to arrest the journalists](#). This move forced many foreign correspondents to flee the country for fear of arrest. There were two (2) recorded incidents of police denying journalist access to covering stories. Two (2) incidents of journalists being threatened were recorded. One incident of online violation was recorded- the UCC blocked social media platforms on Election Day.

In the month of March, three (3) cases of freedom of expression violations were recorded. Police officers arrested a journalist who was [covering a scuffle](#) that ensued between NRM supporters and the police. The cameraman who was with the journalist was also assaulted in the process. An FDC official who protested the arrest of the journalist was allegedly stripped naked before being arrested. In a separate incident, [NRM supporters attacked seven \(7\) journalists](#), destroyed their gadgets and deleted their recordings while army officers and police looked on. In another development, a Member of Parliament assaulted a female journalist who was [covering a case in court](#) against the MP.

Three (3) cases of assault were recorded in April 2016. Police assaulted a journalist who was covering the re-arrest of opposition leader, Besigye. In another incident, football fans attacked a journalist covering a scuffle that ensued during a football match. Lastly, a journalist was beaten by a section of a congregation while he was covering a church event.

Your Excellency, the spate of attacks on the media and opposition leaders, and the clear attempt to muzzle free speech in Uganda is indeed a matter of grave concern that requires your urgent attention. Your timely intervention will ensure that freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in Uganda are not simply guaranteed by the constitution, but also upheld in practice.

By this letter, we call on you to, among others:

- Renew your commitment to promoting freedom of expression and opinion as enshrined in the Ugandan constitution.
- Observe all Regional and International Charters and Protocols on Human Rights to which Uganda is a signatory.

- Openly condemn these unjustifiable attacks/violations on media professionals, opposition officials and supporters.
- Call the security forces especially the Ugandan Police Force to order, investigate and punish perpetrators of the freedom of expression and human rights violations mentioned herein.
- Stop the unjustifiable blockage of social media platforms during national events
- Ensure that journalists carry out their duties in a safe environment.

We are confident that your office will take note of the infractions enumerated above and consider the above recommendations towards improving the media and human rights environment in Uganda.

Thank you.

Signed,

Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP)

Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA)

Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda)

Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC)

Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)

West African Journalists Association (WAJA)

Media Rights Agenda (MRA)

Journaliste en Danger (JED)

National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ)

ABOUT AFEX

AFEX is a continental network of the most prominent African freedom of expression organisations that are also members of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), the global network of free expression organisations. The network is currently made up of nine organisations based in West, East, Central and Southern Africa. AFEX works to increase the effectiveness of its members and to enhance the impact of their work in addressing freedom of expression challenges in Africa.

Learn more about AFEX and its members by visiting www.africafex.org