

Uganda: Journalists' rights body to sue army for brutality



By [Walter Wafula](#)

19 Apr 2011

The Human Rights Network for Journalists (HRN) in Uganda is set to sue the army in Uganda over the violation of journalists' rights. "We are dragging individual commanders to court for these violations, amongst them are Col. David Muhoozi the commandant of Armored Brigade in Masaka and the military police commandant among others," said Robert Ssempala, the HRNJ-Uganda board chairman in a statement last week.



The decision came on the back of the alleged torture and mistreatment of eight Ugandan journalists as they covered the Walk-to-Work demonstrations that have broken out in several towns in Uganda.

The journalists, including television, radio and newspaper reporters came under attack from the army in various parts of the country as they covered outcomes of the demonstrations that turned violent last Thursday and on Monday (18 April 2011).

Media workers brutally harassed

For instance, in Kampala, cameraman Francis Mukasa a Wavah Broadcasting Station (WBS) TV was beaten at Makindye Ssabagabo court while covering protests following the arrest of Kampala mayor elect Ssalongo Erias Lukwago. "Mukasa suffocated after police flashed tear gas onto him. He was rushed to Nsambya hospital in severe condition," Ssempala said.

Ronald Muyinda a Radio One journalist was roughed up by military personnel at Wampeewo from where he was relaying live scenes of gun-fire according to the organisation. "Men in military police attire charged at him and manhandled him. This resulted into breaking his pelvis and the left leg," he said.

Others who were roughed up include; Stuart Iga of the *Red Pepper* newspaper, Yunusu Ntale, a journalist with Central Broadcasting Service (CBS FM), Ali Mabule and Dismus Buregyeya both with the *New Vision*, Isa Aliga a correspondent of NTV in Masaka, Norman Kabugu a journalist with a daily tabloid *Kamunye*, and four others in Masaka.

"Most victim journalists we have talked to indicate that they were properly addressed with stations' marked jackets and identifications. There was no way the military could have mistakenly identified these journalists. Therefore, these were organised crimes to stop journalists from documenting brutal attacks against protestors," Ssempala explained.

Protests over food, fuel prices

The journalists, like many ordinary Ugandans, are becoming victims of the opposition parties-led protests over the escalating food and fuel prices in Uganda. Headline inflation in Uganda rose to 11.1% in March from 6.4% in February 2011. A litre of petrol and diesel have risen to Shs3,500 and Shs3100, respectively, from Shs2,800 and Shs2,500 in February.

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics attributes the rise in the commodity prices like food to a long drought that hit the country leading to lower food production. The rising fuel prices have been attributed to the rise in international fuel prices. A barrel of oil has risen from \$92 per barrel of oil in January to as high as \$125 per on 8 April 2011.

The HRNJ has called on the Uganda Peoples Defense Force (UPDF) to accord the press respect they deserve: "We implore the security forces to exhibit professionalism and restraint in such situations in protecting the fourth estate of government - the media," Ssempala said. He further asked the army to return all the confiscated tools such as camera and recorders to their respective owners with immediate effect.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

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