

## **Uganda: An appeal to all presidential candidates**

*“Human rights are central to Uganda’s future political, economic and social development”, Amnesty international said today on launching the ‘Human Rights Manifesto for Uganda’.*

*The manifesto produced by Amnesty International with the support of over 12 other Ugandan nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), calls for ensuring that every Ugandan has the right to live in a society where basic rights are respected in law and in practice.*

*" The Ugandan population should read the manifesto to understand that they too have rights and demand that all presidential candidates make a public commitment to improve their human rights" said the organization.*

*Uganda will elect a new President in five weeks. This election will not simply determine who governs the country but will provide the people of Uganda with the opportunity to tell their political leaders what kind of society they want to live in.*

*" Every Ugandan has the right to live in a society where basic rights are respected in law and in practice", Amnesty International added.*

*Calling for a greater commitment to human rights principles on the part of Ugandan political leaders, the manifesto addresses a range of areas which continue to be of concern to human rights activists in Uganda.*

*Torture and ill-treatment continue to be practised in police custody, prisons, and other places of detention such as military barracks.*

*Gross human rights violations, mainly by armed opposition groups, are committed in the context of ongoing armed conflict in the north and west of the country. Death penalty, the ultimate violation of a human being's fundamental right to life, is still applied in Uganda. At least 11 people were sentenced to death last year and 29 people were executed in 1999.*

*The rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly are frequently infringed upon and the Ugandan authorities often fail to effectively protect women's rights.*

*The Ugandan Government has repeatedly promised to respect human rights and has signed and ratified a number of international human rights treaties. Yet law and practice continue to contravene these legally binding standards, and have been used by the authorities to restrict fundamental freedoms.*

*Based on recommendations of the manifesto on human rights in Uganda, Amnesty International and the signatory Ugandan NGOs are calling upon all presidential candidates to publicly commit themselves to taking concrete steps to safeguard human rights should they win the presidency.*

*The organization is calling on the Ugandan government to ensure that the necessary enforcement of law and order be exercised in conformity with international standards on law enforcement, and that nobody will be arrested for peacefully expressing their political opinions.*

*“It takes a wholehearted commitment by those in power to protect human rights”, Amnesty International and the supporting organizations said. “All those who seek to govern Uganda should now commit themselves publicly to making human rights a reality for all Ugandans.”*

## **Background**

*Under the “Movement” system, which was endorsed by the Ugandan electorate in a referendum in June 2000, political party activities in Uganda are strictly regulated. Candidates in the forthcoming presidential election are not allowed to stand as representatives of political parties, but must run on individual merit. The National Resistance Movement (NRM), which describes itself as a ‘movement’ rather than as a political ‘party’, has been in power in Uganda since 1986. Its leader, President Yoweri Museveni, won 70% of the popular vote in the last presidential elections in 1996, which however were described as flawed by opposition members and many international observers.*

*There has been a series of reports of violent incidents in Uganda since campaigning for the forthcoming presidential elections officially started in mid-December. In a number of cases, police have dispersed rallies held by supporters of opposition candidates. In January 2001, a member of President Museveni’s campaign task force as well as two supporters of presidential candidate Dr Kizza Besigye were killed by unidentified gunmen in suspicious circumstances.*

*Elections for the presidency will be followed by parliamentary elections in Uganda, currently scheduled for June 2001.*

*To obtain a copy of the manifesto by post, please contact Amnesty International’s Africa Regional Office, Tel: +256 41 222951, or the East Africa*

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