

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST AUTHOR REDETAINED AND TORTURED

On 28 December 2021, armed security operatives arrested activist and author Kakwenza Rukirabashaija and held him in incommunicado detention for 13 days before arraigning him in closed court session where he reported that he had been tortured while in detention. His arrest came after he published critical views on social media about President Yoweri Museveni and his son. The authorities must immediately and unconditionally release him as he is being detained solely in connection to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, which the Ugandan authorities must respect and uphold; this includes the right to express controversial or offensive views.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

The President of the Republic of Uganda

President Yoweri Museveni

Parliament Avenue

Kampala, Uganda

Email: info@statehouse.go.ug

Copies to: press@statehouse.go.ug

Your Excellency,

*I am writing to express my concern for activist and author, **Kakwenza Rukirabashaija**, who is once again being arbitrarily detained for exercising his right to freedom of expression. He was arrested at his home in the Kisaasi area of Kampala, the Ugandan capital, on 28 December 2021 by Special Forces Command (SFC) officers who threatened to break his legs and tear gas him when he exercised his due process right to see a warrant for his arrest, which they failed to present. He was arrested in connection to Twitter posts he made between 26 and 28 December 2021 which the Uganda Police Force claims were meant to disturb the peace of Lieutenant General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the son of President Yoweri Museveni.*

Kakwenza Rukirabashaija was subsequently held in incommunicado detention, without access to his family or lawyers, until 11 January 2022 when he was arraigned in closed session before Buganda Road Chief Magistrate's Court. During the arraignment, which his lawyer was denied access to and which was held in closed session- in a deliberate effort by the authorities to avoid public scrutiny, Kakwenza Rukirabashaija told the Chief Magistrate he had been tortured in detention. The Magistrate ordered he undergo a medical examination. When his lawyer visited him in detention on 12 January 2022, he reported that Kakwenza Rukirabashaija claimed that, while detained, SFC operatives used pliers to pluck pieces of his body- including his feet, back, legs, buttocks and palms; he had visible wounds all over his body. After visiting him in detention, the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the state human rights institution, on 18 January 2022 confirmed that Kakwenza Rukirabashaija had scars and injuries on his body. He is currently remanded at Kitalya Government Prison, about 50km northwest of Kampala, charged with two counts of 'offensive communication' under Section 25 of the Computer Misuse Act. Efforts by his lawyers to get him bail are ongoing. He is next due to appear in court on 22 January.

In light of the above, I urge you to order all charges against Kakwenza Rukirabashaija to be dropped and for him to be immediately and unconditionally released. Pending his release, he must be granted unhindered and regular access to his family, doctors and lawyers, and is protected from torture and other ill-treatment. I further urge you to order a prompt, impartial and effective investigation be carried out into his reports of torture in detention, bringing those suspected of responsibility to account in fair trials.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Kakwenza Rukirabashaija is a Ugandan activist, writer and law student who is well known for writing the books, "The Banana Republic" and "The Greedy Barbarian". He has also authored an opinion piece titled "Uganda perhaps needs own brand of democracy called 'Musevenocrazy'". In this piece he wrote that President Museveni is the worst president that Uganda has ever had. He is also political activist linked to the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party and vied for the Member of Parliament seat for Rubaho constituency in the January 2021 general election. He also documented cases of police killings and brutality during the recently ended Covid-19 lockdown in Uganda.

Kakwenza Rukirabashaija was arrested in connection to Twitter posts he made between 26 and 28 December 2021 which the Uganda Police Force claims were meant to disturb the peace of Lieutenant General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the son of President Yoweri Museveni. In one tweet, he described Lieutenant General Muhoozi Kainerugaba as "obese", "inebriated curmudgeon" and a "pig-headed curmudgeon". He had also tweeted that "the Musevenis [in reference to the President's family] have imposed enormous suffering on this country".

This is not the first time Kakwenza Rukirabashaija has been arrested and arbitrarily detained in connection to his critical views of the President and his son. He was first arrested in April 2020 on trumped-up charges of defamation and cyber related crimes for authoring a book titled "The Greedy Barbarian" which criticized the greed and corruption by the ruling first family of Uganda. He was eventually released on 6 May 2020. He was rearrested on 18 September 2020 because of his book "Banana Republic", published in July 2020, which recounts how he was tortured by the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence during his April 2020 detention. He was released on 6 May 2020 and 21 September 2020 after being charged with 'doing an act likely to spread the infection of disease' and 'inciting violence', respectively.

The Government of Uganda has been increasingly using practices such as arbitrary arrest and detention to systematically harass, intimidate and stifle its critics. Many restrictions have been placed on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly of political opposition members, journalists, human rights defenders and students because they are perceived as a threat to the government.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 16 MARCH 2022

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Kakwenza Rukirabashaija (he/ him/ his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr59/2158/2020/en/>