

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Uganda: Police use excessive force to stifle freedom of assembly and expression**

*Amnesty International today expressed concern at the apparent use of excessive force by the police in stopping a planned rally by the Uganda People's Congress (UPC).*

*One person was killed and scores were injured on Saturday 12 January 2002, when uniformed police officers opened fire, using live ammunition, to disperse a crowd which had gathered in front of Uganda House, headquarters of the UPC. The crowd had earlier been turned away by police from Constitutional Square where the rally was to be held.*

*"The use of live ammunition by the police signals an apparent disregard for the lives of people who were to participate in a rally, and was contrary to earlier statements made by the police with regard to the planned rally," Amnesty International said.*

*Following the shooting, the Inspector General of Police, Maj. General Katumba Wamala ordered the arrest of the police officers in charge and promised an investigation into the death of a trainee journalist, Jimmy Ojotre Higenyi.*

*"Amnesty International welcomes the Inspector General's condemnation of the use of live ammunition by the police. The police's admission of full responsibility for the shooting and the promise of an investigation into the incident is laudable. This must be conducted in a fair and speedy manner and its findings made public," the organization said.*

Earlier on Saturday morning, Dr. James Rwanyarare, the Chairman of the UPC, was arrested with several others at Uganda House on the charge of "unlawful assembly". He was later released on police bond and is due to report to police at the end of the month. One UPC member, Night Kulabako was hospitalised for a few days as a result of injuries sustained during her arrest. Dr. Rwanyarare's arrest comes soon after charges were dropped against another opposition politician Ken Lukyamuzi for also attempting to hold a rally in Constitutional Square. Several journalists who were filming the arrest of Dr. Rwanyarare were also arrested, and their equipment destroyed by police. They were later released from Central Police Station, Kampala.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Ugandan police are continuing to use Article 269 of the Constitution, which forbids any political party activity, to override Article 29, which provides for freedom of assembly, to stop public rallies held by opposition groups.

"The use of force, including live ammunition by the authorities to quell public rallies by the police reinforces the notion that the Uganda government will continue to use all means in order to continue restricting the right to assembly and to free expression," Amnesty International said.

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