

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Uganda: Investigate Use of Force against Protestors

Amnesty International today urged the Government of Uganda to stop the ongoing use of force against journalists, opposition leaders and their supporters, and in particular Kizza Besigye. The Government must urgently open independent investigations into the use of force against journalists and supporters of opposition leader Kizza Besigye when he returned to Uganda on 12 May 2011, following medical treatment in Kenya for injuries sustained during protests in Kampala in April. Any law enforcement officials found to be responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable in fair trials which comply with international human rights law without recourse to the death penalty.

Security forces on several occasions fired live ammunition, water canons and tear gas into the crowds of people following Kizza Besigye as he travelled from Entebbe Airport to Kampala on 12 May. There are reports that Security officials also beat up some members of the crowds. At least one person was killed during the course of the day. There are unconfirmed local media reports that four other people were also killed as a result of gunshots.

While some protestors during the last few weeks have at times also used violence, including by throwing stones at security forces, the use of force, including lethal force, by security forces must comply with human rights standards at all times in order to protect the right to life. The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials state that in the case of violent assemblies, security forces must only use firearms when less dangerous means are not practicable, and only to the minimum extent necessary. They can only be used in very limited circumstances, such as where there is imminent threat of death or serious injury and when strictly unavoidable to protect life. The use of "less than lethal" weapons including tear gas, should be carefully controlled to minimise the risk of endangering people not involved in the incident.

Amnesty International is concerned by the ongoing undue restrictions of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly since the general elections in February 2011. The organisation has called on the Ugandan authorities to immediately open an impartial and independent investigation into the actions of security forces, and to hold all officers, including those with operational command, found to have been involved in human rights violations accountable for their actions.

On 12 May 2011, 10 journalists were beaten by security officials while reporting Kizza Besigye's return. At least one required hospital treatment after being hit on the head while photographing clashes between security officials and the crowds following Kizza Besigye's car from Entebbe airport to Kampala. Other journalists had their cameras and other equipment confiscated. Security officials have continually beaten and harassed journalists covering the protests in the last few weeks since the protests began on 11 April.

Amnesty International has called on the Ugandan authorities to end harassment and attacks against journalists and to guarantee the right to freedom of expression for all journalists reporting on the activities of opposition politicians.

Since 11 April 2011, Walk to Work protests led by Kizza Besigye and other opposition politicians against rising prices have been met by a heavy-handed police response. At least ten people were killed across Uganda during these protests. Kizza Besigye, leader of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) political party travelled to Nairobi on 29 April 2011 to receive medical treatment after chemicals were sprayed at his eyes and face during a Walk to Work protest on 28 April 2011.

Public Document

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