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Uganda: Amnesty International says anti-privacy bill should either be drastically amended or withdrawn

Reacting to government plans to submit a bill that would severely limit Ugandans' rights to freedom of expression and privacy, Amnesty International today said that the proposed legislation could seriously undermine human rights in the country and raises the specter of the broad abuse of ministerial powers, with few accountability mechanisms to protect the Ugandan people.

The organization called on the Ugandan government and members of Parliament to urgently amend the Regulation of Interception of Communications (RIC) Bill to incorporate a wide range of crucial human rights safeguards, and today published a detailed memorandum outlining the problems with the RIC Bill.

Amnesty International said that unless the RIC Bill is made consistent with Uganda's Constitutional provisions and regional and international legal obligations, the Bill should be withdrawn.

The RIC Bill would authorize a government minister to conduct surveillance of or intercept communication from any person they wish, on the grounds of preventing crime, protecting the public interest or in the interest of national security, among other reasons. The grounds for authorizing interception of communication are broad and loosely defined.

Amnesty International said that the proposed legislation presents an especially high potential for human rights violations when the Bill is read together with the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The organization said that the RIC Bill as it currently stands is incompatible with the human rights guarantees contained in the Ugandan Constitution and with international human rights standards, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, to which Uganda is a party.

In its memorandum, Amnesty International made several recommendations to the Ugandan government and members of Parliament regarding amending the Bill to include safeguards to ensure human rights protection, including:

- Independent supervision of or accountability over the executive power to authorise interception of communication and the conduct of surveillance.
- That the Bill and the Act unambiguously define grounds for and the purposes of interception of communication and surveillance, requiring that such measures be proportionate to the objective.
- That the Monitoring Centre proposed to conduct interception of communications is independent of the Minister or the executive in its establishment and operations.
- That the provision for appeal in the RIC Bill be amended to provide that anyone aggrieved by the issuance of a warrant under the proposed law have the right to appeal and review, including access to an independent and impartial judicial authority.

- That the loose and wide-definition of terrorism and additional offences in the Anti-Terrorism Act that may be invoked to authorise interception of communication or surveillance under the RIC Bill be amended to clearly and precisely define the proscribed acts.

The see a full copy of *Uganda: Amnesty International Concerns on the Regulation of Interception of Communications Bill 2007*, please click [here](#).

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