

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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Uganda: Independent media and journalists at risk

Amnesty International urges the Uganda Government to immediately lift the continued suspension of the Monitor Newspaper, after its closure following a controversial story published on 10 October.

"In order to show the government's commitment to basic human rights, such as freedoms of expression and access to information which are guaranteed by the Uganda constitution and international law, the paper should be allowed to continue to be published," the organization said today.

Amnesty International condemns the raid of the Monitor's premises and is concerned that this raid represents the government's continued infringement to press freedom in the country since early this year. This is the sixth day that the newspaper, one of the only independent dailies in Uganda, has not been allowed to go to print. There has been no indication by the authorities as to when the paper may appear again.

The premises of the Monitor, based in Kampala, were locked and sealed on 10 October after security forces carried out a search following the publication of an article alleging that an army helicopter, flown by expatriates, was shot down by the Lord's Resistance Army, who has been fighting the government for at least 16 years in northern Uganda. The security forces took computers, diskettes, tapes, documents and mobile phones away with them.

Amnesty International also urges the authorities to stop the harassment of independent journalists.

"All journalists should be allowed to work without fear or retribution from the government," the organization said.

"We are particularly concerned about the continued detention in Gulu Central Police Station of Frank Nyakairu, the author of the story. He told AI that he has not yet been brought before a court to answer any charges since his arrest."

Frank Nyakairu, held since 11 October, has been accused of publishing 'a false report which is likely to cause fear and alarm to the public or to disturb the public peace'. Amnesty International calls upon the government to either charge Frank Nyakairu with a recognisable criminal offence or to release him immediately.

Charles Onyango Obbo, Managing Editor of the Monitor, was yesterday taken into police custody for questioning over the article and for publishing information prejudicial to national security and the

publication of false news. He was arrested yesterday, then released on police bond. He is due to appear in court today.

On Monday 14 October, two other editors of the Monitor were summoned for questioning by the security forces for the same offences. After arrest they were released on police bond and are also due to appear in court today. Amnesty International said that they remain anxious over the apparent harassment of journalists and editors of the newspaper.

"The Monitor has clashed with the government over a series of articles in the past and has been taken to court. This seems to be just another series of intimidation and harassment by a government which reneges on its promise of a free and independent media for Ugandans," Amnesty International stated.

Public Document

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