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## **Uganda: New government must prioritise improving human rights**

As President Yoweri Museveni forms his new government and begins his new term in office, Amnesty International is urging him to take steps to improve Uganda's patchy human rights record.

Amnesty International today published a Human Rights Agenda for Uganda which recommends nine areas that the Ugandan government should prioritise to improve human rights.

"Although there has been some progress towards improving human rights in Uganda since the last election in 2006, there remain a number of worrying issues which require the government's urgent attention," said Michelle Kagari, Amnesty International's deputy Africa program director.

"On the eve of his new term, President Museveni has the chance to make a real and public commitment to improving human rights across the country and we're urging him to take it."

Amnesty International identified the current restriction on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly as a priority for human rights change in Uganda.

The blanket ban against all forms of public assemblies and demonstrations that has been in force since the conclusion of the February 2011 general elections must be immediately lifted. Walk to Work protests which began on April 11 have been marred by the use of excessive force by security forces, including the use of firearms against crowds which were not posing an imminent threat of death or serious injury, killing at least ten people and injuring dozens more.

"President Museveni must take immediate steps to improve the freedom of expression in Uganda. Perceived critics of the government have faced harassment and intimidation," said Michelle Kagari. "The proposed Press and Journalists (Amendment) bill should be withdrawn and the right to peaceful protest upheld."

Amnesty International is also worried that torture and ill-treatment by Ugandan security officials remains widespread.

In recent years, including 2010, Amnesty International, the Uganda Human Rights Commission and other national and international non-governmental organizations have documented cases of law enforcement officials subjecting detainees in their custody to torture and other ill-treatment.

Also in 2010 dozens of people in Karamoja were reportedly killed in unclear circumstances during ongoing security and disarmament operations by the Ugandan army in the region. Government soldiers are accused of committing torture and other forms of ill-treatment during these operations.

"The new government must immediately launch an independent and impartial investigation into all

reports of unlawful killings, torture or ill-treatment”, said Michelle Kagari. “Anyone implicated in these or other human rights violations must be brought to account through a fair trial.”

Another area of serious concern for Amnesty International is discrimination against people based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation. In previous years, including 2010, certain sections of the Ugandan media fuelled homophobia by printing the names and photos of people they thought or perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender along with messages inciting violence against them.

As a result a number of persons were targeted with violence, intimidation and harassment within their homes and communities. Amnesty International continues to document instances of arbitrary arrests, detention, torture and other ill treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgender people in Uganda.

“These human rights violations have been committed on the pretext of enforcing existing provisions of the Uganda penal code. The government has done little to prevent it and in some cases has fuelled these attacks,” said Michelle Kagari.

“The new government must publicly condemn and take measures to put an end to this discrimination, as well as the threats and violence to persons because of their real or perceived sexual orientation.”

Among other areas identified as requiring government attention is the need to respect human rights in counterterrorism measures. While the perpetrators of the July 2010 Kampala bombings need to be brought to justice, respect for human rights must be central to the criminal justice process.

Cases of human rights violations include the unlawful transfer of suspects from Kenya, incommunicado detention and ill-treatment of some of the suspects. In addition the government continues to unduly restrict the work of human rights defenders who are working to monitor respect for human rights of suspects in this case.

“Certain sections of the population in Uganda, such as women, journalists and sexual minorities fail to receive the protection they deserve from their government,” said Michelle Kagari.

“The new government must reach out to these people and offer them the security they are entitled to under the Ugandan constitution as well as the regional and international human rights treaties Uganda is party to.”