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Uganda: Growing restrictions on freedom of association, movement and expression

The detention, and release on bail, of Winnie Byanyima, MP for Mbarara Municipality, highlights the growing repression of any form of non-violent opposition to the Ugandan government, Amnesty International said today.

Winnie Byanyima, an opposition MP and wife of Kiiza Besigye, has been charged with unlawful possession of a gun under circumstances suggesting evidence of harassment. Col. Besigye, the strongest opposition candidate who opposed President Museveni during the March 2001 presidential elections, fled to the United States last week.

"Since the outcome of the presidential elections, basic internationally recognised freedoms of expression, association and movement have become even more strictly curtailed," Amnesty International said. The organization reiterates its concern about the increasingly hostile environment that opposition members find themselves in when peacefully expressing divergent points of view.

Besigye's flight to the United States was the culmination of a series of restrictions on his movements which had previously prevented him from leaving the country, and led him to express fears for his safety. "The continuous harassment of Besigye highlights the government's policy of intimidation and harassment of people purely for expressing views different to those of the ruling political movement", said Amnesty International.

"Amnesty International is also shocked and disappointed at remarks attributed to President Museveni that those not supporting the

ruling Movement will be purged from the public service. This statement only reinforces the notion of the Movement system as being exclusive rather than encompassing the inclusive mandate it is meant to uphold. Those with dissenting viewpoints are more likely to become targets and Amnesty International is worried for their safety," the organization said.

The lack of fundamental freedoms in Uganda for people who have expressed views that are opposite to those of the government follows a increasingly evident pattern of repression and intimidation. "The government of Uganda should allow people to express their views, through peaceful means without fear and should end the increasing level of harassment that has characterised the period after the presidential elections held in March," the organization said.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>