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## **Uganda: Public Management Order Bill is a serious blow to open political debate**

The Public Order Management Bill which is likely to be passed by Uganda's parliament tomorrow represents a serious blow to open political debate in the country, Amnesty International said today.

The Bill imposes wide ranging restrictions on public meetings and gives the police unprecedented powers to prohibit and disperse public gatherings of a political nature.

In its current form, for example, the Bill gives the police discretionary powers to prevent a gathering of as few as three people in a public place to discuss political issues.

"This Bill represents a serious blow to open political debate in a country where publicly criticizing the government is already fraught with risk," said Sarah Jackson, Amnesty International's deputy Africa director.

"The Ugandan government must stop trying to crush the rights to free speech and peaceful demonstration as enshrined in its own constitution as well as international law."

The provisions of the Bill require that written notice of meetings is submitted to the police seven days in advance and that such meetings can only be held between 6 am and 6pm. It also allows the police to stop or prevent a public meeting if they believe it poses a breach of the peace or public order.

The Bill allows the police to disperse people at a public meeting and to use firearms without internationally recognised safeguards.

"This insidious Bill is designed to intimidate civil society and shrink Uganda's diminishing political space further still," said Sarah Jackson.

"Prohibitions on open political discussion and peaceful demonstration are alarming and utterly impermissible under international law."

State interference and repression in Uganda has been at a particularly high level in recent months. In May 2013, two newspapers and two radio stations were closed for 10 days after they reported on an alleged government plot to assassinate politicians opposed to President Yoweri Museveni's son taking over when his father steps down.

Riot police arrested five human rights activists and two journalists, some of whom were beaten during the arrests, while they were protesting against the closure of the Monitor, Uganda's leading independent newspaper.

Amnesty International calls on the Ugandan Parliament to reject the Public Management Order Bill and

on the government to stop restricting the basic rights of the Ugandan people to participate freely in political debates and discussions.