



Harmonizing national security concerns and civil liberties in Uganda, including media freedoms

Background

Whereas the constitution of the Republic of Uganda enjoins the citizens to freely partake in fundamental civil liberties, such as free speech and media freedoms, the same law also provides for responsibilities and limitations in the enjoyment of those rights.

Article 43 (1) of the constitution on General limitation on fundamental and other human rights and freedoms states that in the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms, “no person shall prejudice the fundamental or other human rights and freedoms of others or interest.”

Furthermore, article 17 of the same constitution clearly elaborates on the duties and responsibilities of a citizen, which inter alia, include,

a) to respect the national anthem, flag, coat of arms and currency;

- (b) to respect the rights and freedoms of others;
- (c) to protect children and vulnerable persons against any form of abuse, harassment or ill-treatment;
- (d) to protect and preserve public property;
- (e) to defend Uganda and to render national service when necessary;
- (f) to cooperate with lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order;
- (g) to pay taxes;
- (h) to register for electoral and other lawful purposes;
- (i) to combat corruption and misuse or wastage of public property;
- (j) to create and protect a clean and healthy environment; and
- (k) to perform such other national duties and obligations as Parliament may by law prescribe.

Media misuse and its effects on national security

However, it has become increasingly noted over the years that some licensed media houses as well as individuals, using media channels of all forms and types are increasingly stretching the limits of their freedoms, thereby leading to significant security

concerns for the country. This has manifested mainly in the form of hate speech, incitement of violence, sectarianism, formation and practice of militant political groups, and so on and so forth.

Indeed, there is visible anxiety in our society today created by well-planned media maneuvers both on online and traditional media. As we head into a politically heated season, it is feared that misuse of media, especially online media is likely to cause more anxiety and unrest and endanger the fabric of our countries security framework as we look on. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Therefore, the national security services/forces under the Umbrella National Security Council and the working Inter-Agency Security Committee have resolved to take measures to mitigate upcoming threats and narrow the coordination gap between the security forces and media operators, including the traditional media, social media and online publications.

Some of the suggested measures include:

- a) a responsibility by media operators and editors to take proactive steps to mitigate or eliminate harmful content from their platforms,

- b) guaranteeing consistency and accuracy in the publishing of content by media houses across the various media channels used including TV, radio, print and online, void of bias.
- c) ensuring that whatever is published is in conformity with the relevant laws of Uganda, including but not limited to the Penal Code Act, UPDF Act (as amended), the Computer Misuse Act, etc.
- d) inculcating the spirit of patriotism, realizing that we all need a stable and peaceful Uganda to thrive as individuals, groups, and nation.
- e) formation of active coordination mechanisms between the media agencies and security services
- f) promotion of unity and tolerance among our people despite our diverse backgrounds

Consequently, the point is to make sure that there exists a careful balance between civil liberties and national security. Ensuring national security for all is a sacrosanct role of the government. It is the foundation upon which political freedoms, economic opportunity and the rule of law are based. Sufficient and overarching security measures safeguard life and property,

thereby encouraging investments, job creation, innovations, and creativity.

Other precedents

It must be recalled that the 1994 Rwanda Genocide was incited largely by Radiotélévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), nicknamed "Radio Genocide" or "Hutu Power" which broadcast from July 8, 1993, to July 31, 1994. It played a significant role in inciting the Rwandan genocide that took place from April to July 1994. In North Africa, the Arab spring of 2010-12 left scores dead, property destroyed, and entire countries ruined. It was all incited and organized via social media. The government of Uganda will therefore not seat and watch as similar attempts are made here. We are students of history who have learnt the devastating consequences of media misuse.

Interventional measures

The communications regulator, Uganda Communications Commission, security agencies and all licensed traditional and online Media houses and owners will thus come together to identify decisive solutions towards emerging challenges in the communications sector. It is recommended that there be enhanced

engagement between the regulator, security agencies and media operators.

In addition, it is suggested by H.E the President that media owners, CEOs and key personnel (editors) undergo a cadre course at the National Leadership Institute Kyankwanzi (NALI) to remind ourselves of the cardinal roles of media and other national matters as shall be agreed upon. This important few days course should be concluded by 30th June 2025.

On behalf of General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the Senior Presidential Advisor on Special Operations and Chief of Defence Forces, who was assigned by H.E the President of Uganda to chair a harmonization of national security concerns and civil liberties in Uganda including media freedoms.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

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