

JOINT STATEMENT BY BAR ASSOCIATIONS, LAW SOCIETIES AND LAWYERS' ORGANISATIONS ON THE ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE, DETENTION AND PROSECUTION OF ADVOCATE ERIAS LUKWAGO

2nd July 2026

We, the undersigned bar associations, law societies, lawyers' organisations, and human rights institutions, express serious concern regarding the enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention, public humiliation, and criminal prosecution of Ugandan lawyer and senior opposition figure Advocate Erias Lukwago on misprision of treason charges.

Advocate Lukwago is a prominent lawyer from Uganda, former mayor of Kampala, and co-lead counsel for opposition leader Dr. Kizza Besigye, and Haji Obeid Lutale, in proceedings that have attracted significant national, regional, and international attention. These proceedings include a suit against Uganda's Chief of Defence Forces, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the son of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, in connection with alleged statements repeatedly threatening Dr. Besigye's life on social media.

According to information placed before the High Court Uganda, on 15 June 2026, armed individuals reportedly dressed in Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) attire surrounded Advocate Lukwago's residence, scaled the perimeter wall, forcibly entered his home, and removed him without producing a warrant or disclosing his destination. A habeas corpus application filed on his behalf alleged that he was taken by military personnel, held at an undisclosed location, and denied access to his family, legal counsel, and physician. The application further alleges that senior military officials publicly claimed responsibility for the operation through social media posts.

We are particularly concerned by widely circulated statements and images reportedly published by Uganda's Chief of Defence Forces, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba through his official social media/[X account](#), before Advocate Lukwago was brought before court. These statements appeared to claim responsibility for his detention, threaten him with physical punishment, subject him to public humiliation and ridicule, and suggest that he was being held in military custody. Such conduct is wholly incompatible with constitutional governance, the presumption of innocence, the dignity of detained persons, judicial independence, and the rule of law.

On 17 June 2026, Advocate Lukwago was produced before the Chief Magistrate's Court of Makindye in Kampala and charged with misprision of treason under Section 25 of the Penal Code Act (Cap. 128), arising from allegations that he failed to disclose information relating to alleged treasonous activities. The charge comes after almost two years of him handling the same matter that he is being enjoined to. He denied the charge, and was remanded to Luzira Prison until Monday 22 June 2026, when his case was due to be mentioned and a ruling on bail delivered.

On 22 June 2026, Advocate Lukwago was produced before the Makindye Chief Magistrate's Court for the ruling on his bail application, which had been sought on medical grounds in light of his deteriorating health. The ruling was deferred, reportedly citing the sensitivity of the case and security concerns at the court premises, and indicated that it would instead be

delivered electronically through the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS). On 23 June 2026, bail was denied, arguing that despite Advocate Lukwago's fixed housing and a documented medical condition requiring continuous treatment, these factors were insufficient to warrant his release. While directing the prison authorities to refer him to Mulago National Referral Hospital for a comprehensive medical assessment, the court ordered that he remain remanded at Luzira Prison, with the substantive case due to be mentioned again on 30 June 2026. We are deeply concerned that bail was denied notwithstanding credible and documented concerns regarding Advocate Lukwago's health and the conditions of his detention, and urge for his medical needs be addressed

We note that misprision of treason under section 25 of the Penal Code Act (Cap. 128) is framed as a failure to disclose known treasonous intent. The application of this provision to a practising lawyer raises serious concerns regarding legal professional privilege and the duty of confidentiality -- key obligations to the right to effective legal representation, which a lawyer cannot lawfully set aside. We further note that the East Africa Law Society, the apex regional bar association in East Africa, has already expressed grave concern regarding the circumstances of Advocate Lukwago's detention and has emphasized that advocates must never be targeted or subjected to reprisals for carrying out their professional duties.

A Pattern of Interference with Defence Counsel

This incident cannot be viewed in isolation. It forms part of a documented pattern of arrests, intimidation, reprisals, and interference directed at lawyers and legal representatives involved in politically sensitive matters in Uganda.

Most notably, human rights lawyer Eron Kiiza, a member of Dr. Besigye's legal team, was arrested, assaulted, summarily convicted by the General Court Martial, and imprisoned on 7th January 2025 while attempting to represent his client. In a further reported incident, lawyer Ronald Iduli, also a member of the defence team, was allegedly subjected to an early morning raid of his family home on December 10, 2024. Reports further indicate that, on a separate occasion, lawyer Mariam Lutale was forcibly removed from a courtroom by uniformed personnel following a verbal protest directed at the presiding judge. We are gravely concerned by these cumulative reports and call for their independent investigation.

This pattern of interference has since extended to regional counsel. On 22 June 2026, shortly before the scheduled bail ruling, Kenyan Senior Counsel Martha Karua, a former Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs of Kenya, leader of the People's Liberation Party, and the leader of the legal team representing Dr. Besigye and Haji Obeid Lutale, was denied entry into Uganda at Entebbe International Airport, and deported to Kenya. Ms. Karua had travelled to Kampala to support Advocate Lukwago's defence team and observe the proceedings. She was reportedly held incommunicado at the airport and had her telephone taken from her before being returned to Kenya without any explanation, while other members of the delegation, including the President of the Law Society of Kenya, were cleared to enter.

The cumulative effect of these incidents has been to significantly reduce the number of lawyers willing and able to participate in proceedings of direct public interest. This is a matter of serious concern for the administration of justice and for the rights of the accused to legal representation of their choosing in Uganda.

Applicable Legal Standards

Lawyers must be able to carry out their professional duties without intimidation, harassment, threats, surveillance, arrest, detention, or other reprisals. The targeting of lawyers because of the clients they represent or the causes they advance strikes at the heart of the administration of justice and undermines public confidence in the rule of law.

Principle 16 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provides that governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment, or improper interference and shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or other sanctions for actions taken in accordance with their professional duties.

Principle 18 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers also provides that lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a consequence of discharging their professional functions.

The circumstances surrounding Advocate Lukwago's detention and prosecution are especially troubling because they appear to have arisen in the context of his professional representation of politically sensitive clients and while he was preparing to effect service of court process in proceedings involving those clients. Such actions taken against a lawyer in circumstances that appear connected to the discharge of professional duties raise serious concerns regarding interference with the independence of the legal profession and the administration of justice.

Call to Action

Accordingly, we call upon the Government of Uganda, the diplomatic community and all relevant authorities to:

1. Ensure a prompt, independent, impartial, and transparent investigation is conducted into the circumstances surrounding Advocate Lukwago's enforced disappearance, detention, treatment, and alleged ill-treatment.
2. Ensure that any threats, intimidation, or interference directed at Advocate Lukwago in connection with his professional representation of his clients are promptly and efficiently investigated.
3. Ensure that all allegations of unlawful detention, torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and violations of due process are independently investigated and that those responsible are held accountable.
4. Guarantee Advocate Lukwago's safety, physical integrity, dignity, access to legal counsel of his choice family members, and medical treatment.
5. Ensure that all criminal proceedings against Advocate Lukwago are dropped for being an abuse of process and the privilege and privacy of communications between lawyers and clients or conducted strictly in accordance with the Constitution of Uganda, international human rights law, and fair trial guarantees.
6. Respect and protect the independence of the legal profession and ensure that lawyers are able to carry out their professional duties without intimidation, hindrance, harassment, reprisals, or improper interference.
7. Ensure that public officials, including military officials, refrain from statements or conduct that may undermine the presumption of innocence, interfere with ongoing judicial proceedings, intimidate lawyers, or otherwise prejudice the administration of justice.
8. Ensure that all lawyers and human rights defenders in Uganda can perform their professional duties without fear of reprisals, harassment, or undue interference, in

accordance with international standards, notably by implementing the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

9. Ensure the security, safety and dignity of the lawyers representing Dr. Kizza Besigye and Haji Obeid Lutale; and
10. The immediate reversal of the illegal declaration of Kenyan Senior Counsel Martha Karua, as *persona non grata* – a term alien to the domestic law of Uganda and reserved for diplomats in accordance with the Vienna Conventions – and guarantee her safe passage and entry into Uganda to proceed with her work of legally representing Dr. Kizza Besigye and Haji Obeid Lutale in their defense of the treason charges against them that carry a death sentence.

We further call upon regional and international bodies, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the East African Community, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, and other relevant regional and international mechanisms to closely monitor this matter and take all appropriate measures to safeguard the independence of the legal profession and the rule of law in Uganda.

The independence of lawyers is not a privilege of the legal profession. It is a safeguard for society as a whole. When lawyers are intimidated, detained, threatened, or prosecuted because of their professional activities, access to justice, the right to a fair trial, and the rule of law itself are placed at risk. An attack on one lawyer for carrying out his or her professional duties is an attack on the administration of justice itself.

Signatories:

African Judges and Jurists Forum (AJJF)

Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC)

Constitution Defenders Forum

Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (Conseil des Barreaux Européens, CCBE)

Deutscher Anwaltverein (German Bar Association)

Foundation Day of the Endangered Lawyer

Human Rights Institute of the Brussels Bar

Institute for the Rule of Law of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA-IROL)

International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL)

International Association of Russian Advocates

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD)

Law Society of England and Wales

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)

Pan-African Lawyers Union (PALU)

Republikanischer Anwältinnen- ©Anwältverein (Republican Lawyers Association)

SADC Lawyers Association (SADC-LA)

Tanganyika Law Society (TLS)

Ubuntu Africa Law Group

Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR)