

Joint Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review

Uganda: 54th session of the UPR Working Group (January - February 2027) 4th Cycle

Situation of Lawyers in Uganda

Submitted by the International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD)

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)

The Pan-African Lawyers Union (PALU)

The Uganda Law Society (ULS)

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)



Pan African Lawyers Union
Union Panafricaine des Avocats
União Pan-Africana dos Advogados
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Information on the submitting organisations

The **Uganda Law Society (ULS)** is the National Bar Association of Uganda established under the Uganda Law Society Act of 1956, CAP 305 of the Laws of Uganda. It works closely with the Civil Society to foster the Rule of Law and access to justice nationally and in the region. Its statutory mandate which is “to protect and assist the public in Uganda in all matters touching, ancillary or incidental to the law, and; to assist the Government and the Courts in all matters affecting legislation and the administration and practice of law in Uganda” is targeted to benefit all persons in Uganda regardless of their culture, ethnicity, language, race, religious belief, socio-economic background, gender, sexual orientation and other factors that form a basis for discrimination, marginalization and disempowerment.

The ULS executes this mandate through provision of services including. Governing of the legal profession in Uganda, operation of legal aid clinics to provide subsidized legal services to people all over the country, sensitizing the general public about their rights, obligations and all matters touching the law, advising parliament on policy and legislation, advising government and the courts on legal matters and challenging actions that threaten human rights or independence of the judiciary and the legal profession and providing continuing legal education, training and resources to help lawyers improve their legal practice.

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The **International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)** was established in 1995 under the honorary presidency of emblematic human rights defender, the late Nelson Mandela, and works with the global legal community and partner civil society organisations to promote and protect human rights and the independence of the legal profession worldwide. The IBAHRI is a substantively autonomous entity within the International Bar Association, the world’s leading organisation of international legal practitioners, bar associations and law societies, with over 80,000 individual lawyers, and 190 bar associations and law societies across more than 160 countries. Under the IBAHRI’s By-Laws, the Institute is governed by an independent Council and is under the Directorship of Baroness Helena Kennedy LT KC.

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The **International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD)** is an international organisation founded by the Conseil National des Barreaux (France), the Consiglio Nazionale Forense (Italy), the Consejo General de la Abogacía Española (Spain) and the Paris Bar (France). Established in 2016, its aim is to defend lawyers who are threatened in the course of their professional duties and to highlight situations that undermine the rights of the defence. The Observatory is currently supported by more than 50 members and its mandate is to provide assistance to lawyers subjected to threats and persecution while exercising their profession, and to raise awareness amongst political actors and civil society of the fundamental role played by lawyers in safeguarding rights and freedoms.

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Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) is an independent, non-political and not-for-profit lawyers' organisation established in 1986. Its mission is to promote the independent functioning of lawyers and the legal

profession across the world in accordance with internationally recognised norms and standards. Its work supporting lawyers who are at risk because of discharging their professional duties seeks to protect them from threats, risks and reprisals, strengthen their international recognition and protection, and empower them to fulfil their role. Lawyers for Lawyers was granted special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council in July 2013.

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The **Pan-African Lawyers Union (PALU)** is the premier continental membership forum of and for individual African lawyers and lawyers' associations in Africa. PALU has extensive experience in defending the independence of the legal profession and protecting lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists, and other civic actors at risk, including through strategic litigation before regional courts and tribunals. It engages with regional and international human rights mechanisms to advance accountability and strengthen human rights protections, contributes to legal and policy reform across Africa, provides technical legal expertise, and undertakes advocacy initiatives to safeguard civic space, access to justice, and the integrity of judicial and legal institutions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The International Observatory of Lawyers at Risk (OIAD), Pan-African Lawyers Union (PALU), the Uganda Law Society (ULS), Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) submit this joint report to the 4th cycle Universal Periodic Review of Uganda. This submission addresses the human rights situation in Uganda with particular respect to the independence of the judiciary, of the legal profession and the protection of lawyers as key actors upholding human rights, access to justice, and the rule of law. It examines how the shrinking civic space described below manifests concretely in restrictions on the free and independent exercise of the legal profession.
2. This submission is based on information received from lawyers practising in Uganda and research carried out by the submitting organisations, focusing on the following thematic areas:
 - Lack of independence of the judiciary;
 - Laws and regulations undermining the independence of the legal profession;
 - Barriers to practice preventing lawyers from effectively representing clients;
 - Systemic persecution of lawyers.
3. Finally, it puts forward recommendations to the Ugandan Government to address the systemic violations described and align with international standards on human rights and rule of law.

a. Relevant 3rd Cycle UPR Recommendations and Implementation Status

4. During Uganda's 3rd cycle UPR review in January 2022, the Government received recommendations related to judicial independence, due process, freedom of expression, and the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) and civic space; 15 of these were supported by the Government. Four of the supported recommendations are listed below; the eleven others called for enhanced protections for freedom of expression and civic space. This submission demonstrates that supported recommendations have not been implemented.

125.146 the Government should continue to reinforce measures that guarantee the rights of citizens to peaceful demonstration and freedom of expression (Ghana)

125.155 the Government should continue efforts to strengthen the rule of law and access to justice (Tunisia)

125.156 the Government should continue efforts to reform the judicial system and ensure its independence (Libya)

125.159 the Government should ensure that detainees are brought before a court within 48 hours of arrest, as required by the Constitution (Zambia)

b. Civic Space and the 2026 Electoral Period

5. Uganda has been led by President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni since 1986. Although the country has democratic institutions and a Constitution guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, there are significant concerns regarding a shrinking civic space, characterised in particular by restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and political participation.ⁱ These restrictions have intensified around the January 2026 general election and the ongoing legislative changes described in this submission. In the lead-up to the election, the Government suspended a number of civil society organisationsⁱⁱ and imposed a nationwide internet shutdown through polling days,ⁱⁱⁱ and the post-election period has been marked by reports of enforced disappearances and a broader crackdown on opposition figures and civil society that has continued since.^{iv}
6. In this context, lawyers play a vital role in safeguarding the rule of law, ensuring access to justice and defending fundamental rights. However, lawyers involved in cases relating to human rights, the political opposition or civil liberties face particular difficulties in the practice of their profession. The incidents documented in this submission point to an increasingly hostile working environment for members of the legal profession.
7. These practices are incompatible with the safeguards enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution and with Uganda's international obligations, notably under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter), the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (Basic Principles) and the IBA standards on the Independence of the Legal profession.

II. LACK OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY

a. Executive Interference in Judicial Independence

8. Article 128(1) of the Constitution of Uganda guarantees that the judiciary is independent and "shall not be subject to the control or direction of any person or authority." In practice, however, the formal appointments process already concentrates significant power in the executive: High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court judges are selected by the President following a recommendation from the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), but JSC members are themselves presidentially appointed with parliamentary approval,^v a structure which grants the executive influence over the composition of the bench at both stages. The judiciary has been widely described as increasingly compromised by executive influence.^{vi} On 22 September 2022, President Museveni publicly stated that "the judiciary cannot be independent of the Ugandan people," and acknowledged that government agencies would, at their discretion, disregard court rulings they disagreed with; security agencies have been reported to routinely defy court orders to release detainees or arraign persons held without charge, and to intimidate judicial officers against granting bail in politically sensitive cases.^{vii}
9. This pattern is evident in the ongoing prosecution of opposition leader Dr Kizza Besigye, discussed further at Section III and IV below. On 4 July 2026, President Museveni publicly commented on the merits of Dr Besigye's pending trial and renewed his call to abolish bail; the ULS characterised the remarks as sub judice contempt of court and as an unconstitutional executive interference with an active case.^{viii} Between February and August 2025, three different High Court judges were separately alleged to have unlawfully

denied him bail or delayed habeas corpus hearings, including one brought on behalf of his lawyer, Eron Kiiza; the JSC declined to act against one of these judges on the basis that judicial discretion over bail fell outside its remit. Restrictions on judicial independence have extended directly to the legal profession: meetings convened by the ULS on 12 January and 6 February 2024 to discuss threats to judicial independence were each restrained by order of the High Court, on applications brought by the Attorney General and by a private advocate respectively.^{ix} The submitting organisations raised these developments with United Nations mandate holders in June 2024.^x

10. This pattern of executive pressure is inconsistent with Article 14(1) of the ICCPR and Principle 2 of the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, which require that the judiciary decide matters free from external pressure or interference "from any quarter or for any reason," and it directly undermines lawyers' ability to secure an independent and impartial hearing for their clients.

b. Persecution of Judicial Officers

11. The case of Supreme Court Justice Esther Kisaakye illustrates the risks faced by judges who appear to rule against the interests of the Government. Justice Kisaakye delivered the sole dissenting opinion in the 2021 presidential election petition brought by opposition candidate Robert Kyagulanyi against President Museveni. She has stated that, in an attempt to prevent her from reading her dissent in open court, police officers confiscated her case file and switched off the courtroom lights and sound system; she nonetheless delivered her judgment sitting alone on the bench using a duplicate copy.^{xi} Over the following two and a half years she was reportedly administratively sidelined, including being denied further judicial work, before the JSC recommended, in February 2023, that a tribunal be established to consider her removal from office. The disciplinary proceedings were described by the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers as "procedurally deficient" and may amount to retaliation for the exercise of her judicial functions.^{xii} The President refused to accept Justice Kisaakye's application for early retirement. Citing credible threats to her life, she left Uganda in 2024; a disciplinary Tribunal of Inquiry into her conduct was subsequently established in February 2025.^{xiii}
12. Intimidation of judicial officers is not confined to the Supreme Court. For instance, the unexplained absence of a sitting Chief Magistrate from a politically sensitive bail hearing has been linked to fear of reprisal following the President's public criticism of judges who grant bail in such cases, indicating that this pressure reaches magistrates handling ordinary criminal matters, not only judges hearing high-profile constitutional litigation. The President of the Uganda Law Society, Isaac Kimaze Ssemakadde, who stated that Uganda's judiciary "has been weakened by executive interference, judicial corruption, prolonged delays, selective justice," and accused the military of "obstruction of lawyers and journalists" and "the trial of civilians before military tribunals," evidencing this broader pattern of intimidation.^{xiv}
13. This treatment of judicial officers is inconsistent with Principles 17–20 of the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, which permit suspension or removal only through fair procedures before an independent body, and never on the basis of a judge's lawful decisions.

c. Case Backlogs

14. Concerns have been raised over chronic case backlogs in Uganda, which particularly affect politically sensitive matters. Cases before the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court have in some instances remained pending for more than five years.^{xv} Understaffing is significant: only around 655 judicial officers serve Uganda's population of some 45 million people, a ratio of roughly one judicial officer for every 64,000 people. As of 31 December 2025, 198,554 cases remained pending nationwide, of which 48,326 were classified as backlog. This backlog is concentrated in the courts of record, with the Court of Appeal and Constitutional Court alone accounting for some 8,172 backlog cases.^{xvi}
15. Delays of this kind disproportionately affect detained clients, including lawyers, human rights defenders and those in marginalised situations awaiting trial. They are inconsistent with the right to trial without undue delay under Article 14(3)(c) of the ICCPR and created further scope for informal pressure to be brought to bear on the judges handling politically sensitive matters.

III. LAWS AND REGULATIONS UNDERMINING THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION

16. Lawyers in Uganda reported significant difficulties in fulfilling their professional functions, particularly in human rights or politically sensitive cases. Several broadly drafted laws contribute to this.

1. Legal Framework Affecting the Independence of Lawyers

a. The UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 and the Continued Use of Military Courts

17. On 31 January 2025, the Supreme Court held unanimously in *Attorney General v Kabaziguruka* that the General Court Martial is a disciplinary body for members of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) and has no jurisdiction to try civilians, and that military courts as then constituted could not deliver a fair hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal as required by Articles 28(1) and 44(c) of the Constitution.^{xvii} The ruling was publicly criticised by the President, and the Chief of Defence Forces, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, demanded a written apology from the Supreme Court and warned of unspecified consequences if none were issued.^{xviii}
18. Rather than implement the judgment, Parliament passed the UPDF (Amendment) Bill on 20 May 2025 and the President assented to it on 16 June 2025.^{xix} The Act restores the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians in circumstances set out in a new section 117A, including the unlawful possession of equipment or ammunition that is a monopoly of the Defence Forces and offences said to be committed in collaboration with service members, categories broad enough to capture the ordinary prosecution of political opponents. The UN Human Rights Office urged the President not to assent to the Bill, recalling that the trial of civilians by military courts is in principle incompatible with international human rights law and permissible only in exceptional cases.^{xx}
19. The Act has direct consequences for the legal profession. Lawyers instructed in these matters must appear before a body whose members are appointed within the military chain of command, and the obstruction, arrest and prosecution of counsel documented at Sections III and IV below arose in precisely this setting.

In the submitting organisations' view, legislating to reverse a final decision of the Supreme Court, rather than complying with it, is itself an interference with judicial independence contrary to Article 14(1) of the ICCPR and Principle 4 of the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, and is inconsistent with the Human Rights Committee's Concluding Observations on Uganda.^{xxi}

b. The NGO Act, Cap. 109

20. The NGO Act, Cap. 109 requires all non-governmental organisations, including those providing legal aid or human rights representation, to register with the National Bureau for NGOs and with District NGO Monitoring Committees, and to sign memoranda of understanding as a condition of operating in a given district.^{xxii} Registration may be refused or revoked where an organisation is deemed to act in a manner “prejudicial to the interests of Uganda and the dignity of the people of Uganda,” a standard which, left undefined by the Act, and criticised as open to abuse against organisations working on contested issues.^{xxiii} Lawyers practising through such organisations risk falling foul of the Act's separate prohibition on NGOs supporting or opposing political parties or candidates simply through the ordinary exercise of their professional duties, and the suspension of civil society organisations ahead of the January 2026 election illustrates how these powers are used in practice.^{xxiv} These concerns, raised by the submitting organisations in Uganda's 3rd cycle review, remain unaddressed. They are difficult to reconcile with Principle 24 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and with Principle 3, which requires governments to ensure the provision of legal services to the poor.

c. The Anti-Homosexuality Act, Cap. 117

21. The Anti-Homosexuality Act, Cap. 117, upheld in large part by the Constitutional Court on 3 April 2024,^{xxv} criminalises the “promotion of homosexuality” with penalties of up to twenty years' imprisonment. Although the Court struck down four provisions, including those restricting access to health care for LGBT people and creating a duty to report, it left the great majority of the Act, including this offence, in force. The “promotion” offence is drafted broadly enough to capture advocacy on behalf of LGBT clients and has been assessed as capable of applying to anyone advocating for the rights of LGBT people.^{xxvi} Lawyers accepting such instructions therefore face a heightened risk of prosecution and of disciplinary or other reprisals on account of the clients they represent. This is inconsistent with Principle 18 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, under which lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions, and with Principles 16 and 23, which require that lawyers not be threatened with prosecution for actions taken in accordance with recognised professional duties.

2. Barriers to Practice

22. Lawyers in Uganda, working on cases involving human rights, political opposition or fundamental freedoms operate in an environment marked by increasing pressure from the public authorities and the security forces. Whilst the Constitution guarantees the right to a fair hearing and the right to legal representation, the submitting organisations have documented barriers which prevent lawyers from effectively representing their clients. These barriers raise serious concerns for the protection of the right to a fair trial and defence under the UDHR articles 10 and 11, ICCPR Article 14, Article 7 of the African

Charter, Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 32, and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. They are most acute where clients are tried before military courts.

a. Access to Clients and Lawyer-Client Confidentiality

23. Principle 8 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers requires that persons who are arrested, detained or imprisoned be given adequate opportunities to be visited by and to consult with a lawyer without delay, interception or censorship and in full confidentiality; Principle 22 requires governments to recognise and respect the confidentiality of all lawyer-client communications. Lawyers in Uganda reported that these guarantees are not respected in practice, particularly in cases involving political opponents or persons held by the military authorities.
24. In the proceedings against Dr Kizza Besigye and his co-accused Haji Obeid Lutale before the General Court Martial, the military authorities prevented Mr Eron Kiiza from carrying out his functions as counsel. He was refused entry to the courtroom in which his client was being tried and was arrested on the premises of the military court when he sought to reach him.^{xxvii} Obstructing a lawyer's access to their client in this way is a direct violation of the right of an accused person to effective and confidential legal assistance.^{xxviii}
25. Mr Erias Lukwago, lawyer, former Lord Mayor of Kampala and also a member of Dr Besigye's defence team, was held incommunicado following his arrest in June 2026, without access to his family, his lawyers or his doctor, before being produced before the Makindye court (see Section IV(a) below).^{xxix} Detention of this kind, as defined by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention,^{xxx} deprives the detainee of the confidential legal assistance guaranteed by Principle 8 at the stage at which the risk of coercion and ill-treatment is highest, and raises serious concerns as to respect for legal professional privilege in proceedings against political opponents.
26. The High Court has further ruled that the treason trial of Dr Besigye and Mr Lutale will proceed regardless of whether they are represented by lawyers of their choice.^{xxxi} The right of every person to consult a lawyer of their own choosing, to communicate freely and confidentially with them and to receive effective legal assistance at all stages of proceedings is an essential safeguard of the right to a fair trial under Article 14(3)(b) and (d) of the ICCPR and Principle 1 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

b. Practice before Military Courts

27. The obstacles described above are compounded where clients – or lawyers themselves – are tried before military courts. Mr Kiiza was convicted by the General Court Martial of contempt of court and obstruction of justice under an expedited procedure, without sufficient time to prepare his defence or an effective opportunity to challenge the charges against him, and was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment.^{xxxii} He was tried by the very body before which he had been instructed to appear as counsel.
28. In 2023, the Human Rights Committee expressed concern regarding the use of military courts in Uganda, particularly in cases involving civilians, and reiterated that military courts should not be used to try civilians where the ordinary courts have jurisdiction.^{xxxiii} General Comment No. 32 provides that the trial of civilians by military courts should be exceptional and limited to cases where the State can demonstrate that recourse to such trials is necessary and objectively justified.^{xxxiv} The restrictions imposed on lawyers

in these proceedings heighten the risk of a weakening of judicial safeguards and of the principle of equality of arms between the prosecution and the defence. As set out at Section III(a) above, the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 has entrenched rather than remedied this situation.

c. Identification of Lawyers with their Clients' Causes and the Availability of Counsel

29. Attacks on lawyers involved in politically sensitive cases have a deterrent effect on the profession as a whole. When lawyers are subjected to arrest, prosecution or intimidation because of the people they represent, their ability to practise freely is compromised and the principle that lawyers must not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions is undermined.^{xxxv}
30. This identification operates at the highest levels of the State. In the case of Mr Lukwago, public statements made by the Chief of Defence Forces, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, prior to his court appearance contributed to portraying him publicly as guilty before any judicial determination had been reached, undermining the presumption of innocence under Article 14(2) of the ICCPR.
31. The cumulative effect is a measurable contraction in the availability of independent counsel. The arrests, intimidation and restrictions targeting members of Dr Besigye's defence team have gradually reduced the number of lawyers willing to act in those proceedings,^{xxxvi} and lawyers reported growing reluctance across the profession to accept instructions in matters involving the political opposition, human rights defenders or the accountability of the security forces. Where lawyers fear arrest, prosecution or intimidation on account of the cases they handle, individuals facing prosecution in sensitive matters are left without effective representation, the principle of equality of arms is defeated, and public confidence in the ability of the courts to protect fundamental rights is eroded.

Recommendations:

- 1) Ensure that lawyers can perform their professional duties without intimidation, harassment, interference or the risk of sanctions on account of the clients they represent or the causes they defend, in accordance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.
- 2) Ensure respect for the right of every person to communicate freely and confidentially with a lawyer of their choice and to receive effective legal assistance at all stages of the proceedings.
- 3) Guarantee that every person deprived of their liberty has prompt, effective and confidential access to a lawyer of their choice, including before military courts, in accordance with international standards relating to the right to a fair trial.
- 4) End the use of military courts to try civilians where the ordinary courts have jurisdiction, in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

- 5) Ensure that public authorities, including military officials and representatives of the executive, refrain from any statements or conduct that might undermine the presumption of innocence, intimidate lawyers or interfere with ongoing legal proceedings

IV. SYSTEMIC PERSECUTION OF LAWYERS

a. Judicial Harassment: Arbitrary arrests, detention and prosecutions

32. Since Uganda's previous review, lawyers acting in politically sensitive matters have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution in connection with their professional activities. The use of prosecutions or disciplinary sanctions against lawyers for acts carried out in the course of their duties is a form of judicial harassment contrary to international standards, and the measures documented below have overwhelmingly targeted lawyers representing political opponents.
33. Principles 16 and 17 of the UN Basic Principles provide that lawyers must be able to carry out their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference, and must not be threatened with prosecution or sanctions for acts performed in accordance with recognised professional duties. The arrest and conviction of Mr Eron Kiiza on 7 January 2025 illustrates the disregard of those guarantees: while representing Dr Kizza Besigye before the General Court Martial, he was arrested inside the court building after attempting to enter the courtroom, and was convicted and sentenced the same day (see Section III(2)(b) above).^{xxxvii}
34. In June 2026, Mr Erias Lukwago was arrested at his home by armed individuals in military uniform, who forced their way in and took him to an undisclosed location without a warrant or official notification. He was held incommunicado, without access to his family, his lawyers or his doctor, before being brought before the Makindye court and charged with “misprision of treason” – charges arising directly from his membership of the defence team of a political opponent.^{xxxviii}
35. Following Mr Lukwago’s arrest, the crackdown widened to encompass further civil society lawyers. On 28 June 2026, security operatives raided the home of Ms Eunice Musiime, Executive Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika, while searching for Dr Miria Matembe, a former Minister of Ethics and Integrity who had publicly criticised Mr Lukwago’s seizure under the orders of the Chief of Defence Forces, General Kainerugaba.^{xxxix} During the raid, security operatives arrested both Ms Musiime and Dr Sarah Bireete, Executive Director of the Centre for Constitutional Governance. Both lawyers were released without charge after several hours of questioning.^{xl} Dr Bireete had previously been detained between December 2025 and January 2026 on data protection charges connected with the national voters' register.^{xli}
36. The pattern extends to the leadership of the Bar. In February 2025, the President of the Uganda Law Society, Mr Isaac Kimaze Ssemakadde, was convicted of contempt of court following public statements concerning the functioning of the justice system and calls for institutional reform, and was sentenced in his absence to two years' imprisonment.^{xlii} Several further proceedings and investigations were reportedly brought against him, and he has stated that he left the country because of the impact of those proceedings on his safety and on the exercise of his professional activities.^{xliii} Measures of this kind against an elected head of the Bar, taken in response to statements on matters of public concern relating to the administration

of justice, are inconsistent with Principle 23 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which protects lawyers' freedom of expression, and with Principle 24, which guarantees self-governing professional associations able to exercise their functions without external interference.

b. Physical violence, intimidation and surveillance

37. Combined with arbitrary arrests and prosecutions targeting certain lawyers, acts of violence and intimidation have contributed to creating a climate of insecurity for members of the legal profession, particularly those involved in cases relating to human rights, the political opposition or the accountability of the security forces. Principle 17 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers requires that, where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.
38. Violence by State agents against lawyers has been documented in connection with the Eron Kiiza case: Mr Kiiza was physically assaulted by military personnel during his arrest before being detained in conditions that may amount to ill-treatment.^{xliv}
39. Other members of Dr Besigye's defence team have been subjected to intimidation and coercion. Mr Ronald Iduli was subjected to a night-time search of his family home in December 2024, and Ms Mariam Lutale was forcibly removed from a courtroom by uniformed personnel after challenging the presiding judge's instructions.^{xlv} Both incidents concerned lawyers acting for the same client, and neither has been the subject of any known investigation.
40. Intimidation has also extended to foreign counsel. On 22 June 2026, the Kenyan lawyer Martha Karua, former Minister of Justice of Kenya and a member of Dr Besigye's defence team, was refused entry to Uganda and returned to Kenya. She was detained without being allowed to communicate with anyone and had her mobile phone confiscated prior to her expulsion.^{xlvi} The exclusion of foreign counsel duly instructed in a matter engages Principle 20 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and further narrows the pool of lawyers available to defendants in politically sensitive proceedings.
41. The absence of effective investigation or accountability is a defining feature of this pattern. The submitting organisations are not aware of any independent public inquiry into the assault on Mr Kiiza, the search of Mr Iduli's home, the removal of Ms Lutale from court, the raid on Ms Musiime's home, or the circumstances of Mr Lukwago's incommunicado detention. This impunity fuels a well-founded fear of reprisal, deters the reporting of incidents, and is inconsistent with Uganda's obligation under Article 2(3) of the ICCPR to ensure an effective remedy.

Recommendations:

- 6) Conduct independent, impartial and effective investigations into all allegations of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, violence, intimidation and ill-treatment targeting lawyers, and ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable.

- 7) Guarantee the physical and psychological safety of all lawyers practising in Uganda, particularly those involved in cases relating to human rights or the political opposition.
- 8) Ensure that no lawyer is prosecuted, arrested, detained or punished on account of the clients they represent or acts carried out within the legitimate scope of their professional practice.
- 9) Guarantee respect for legal professional privilege and the confidentiality of communications between lawyers and their clients, in accordance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

ⁱ CIVICUS Monitor, "Uganda" country page, which rates civic space in Uganda as "repressed", available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/uganda/>; Freedom House, "Uganda: Freedom in the World 2025", available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uganda/freedom-world/2025>

ⁱⁱ New York City Bar Association, "Statement on the Targeting of Civil Society Organizations Before the 2026 Elections", 3 February 2026, available at: <https://www.nycbar.org/reports/rising-restrictions-on-civic-space-in-uganda-statement-on-the-targeting-of-civil-society-organizations-before-the-2026-elections/>

ⁱⁱⁱ ARTICLE 19, "Uganda: Stop the crackdown on civic space", 22 January 2026, available at: <https://www.article19.org/resources/uganda-stop-the-crackdown-on-civic-space/>

^{iv} OHCHR, "Uganda: Repression and impunity impacting right to participation in leadup to elections – UN report", 9 January 2026, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/uganda-repression-and-impunity-impacting-right-participation-leadup>

^v Article 142: How Judges Are Appointed in Uganda, Juruga, <https://juruga.org/constitution/article/142/how-judges-are-appointed-in-uganda> (last visited July 16, 2026).

^{vi} Jonas Mbabazi Musinga, Judiciary vs. Executive: The Battle for Rule of Law and Democracy in Uganda, The Observer (Feb. 5, 2025), <https://observer.ug/viewpoint/judiciary-vs-executive-the-battle-for-rule-of-law-and-democracy-in-uganda/> (last visited July 16, 2026)

^{vii} The Independent, "Museveni questions need for judicial independence", September 2022, <https://www.independent.co.ug/museveni-questions-need-for-judicial-independence/>

^{viii} Uganda Law Society, statement of 4 July 2026 on the President's remarks concerning the pending trial of Dr Kizza Besigye and the proposed abolition of bail. See The Observer, "Law Society condemns Museveni's comments on Besigye trial", July 2026, available at: <https://observer.ug/news/law-society-condemns-musevenis-comments-on-besigye-trial/>; The Independent, "ULS accuses Museveni of interfering in Besigye trial", available at: <https://www.independent.co.ug/uls-accuses-museveni-of-interfering-in-besigye-trial/>

^{ix} African Law & Business, "Uganda sounds the alarm over judicial independence", available at: <https://www.africanlawbusiness.com/news/21020-uganda-sounds-the-alarm-over-judicial-independence/> (reporting that meetings convened by the Uganda Law Society on 12 January and 6 February 2024 to discuss the state of the judiciary were each restrained by order of the High Court)

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^{xi} OHCHR, "Uganda: UN expert concerned about proceedings against Supreme Court Justice Kisaakye", 31 March 2023, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/03/uganda-un-expert-concerned-about-proceedings-against-supreme-court-justice-kisaakye>

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