

Uganda: Activists Slam Police Over Pro-Kayihura Mob

By Emmanuel Ainebyoona

Kampala — Human rights defenders have said the raid on Makindye Chief Magistrate's Court by a mob, protesting the criminal trial of Inspector General of Police Gen Kale Kayihura, highlights the selective application of the law.

A pro-Kayihura mob last Wednesday stormed Makindye court protesting the police chief's appearance to answer charges of torture against civilians. Gen Kayihura was expected to appear before court to plead to torture charges arising from police's brutal beating of Dr Kizza Besigye's supporters last month.

The rioters carrying pro-Kayihura placards besieged the chambers of Chief Magistrate Richard Mafabi and closed the door to his office as they chanted pro-Kayihura slogans and demonised those behind his prosecution. The protesters had placards reading; Gen Kayihura Talina-Musango (Gen Kayihura is innocent), "Uganda Police Force Equals People's Force" and "Police need justice, not injustice."

Human rights defenders say the impunity with which the mob paralysed court proceedings exhibited the continued selective application of the Public Order Management Act (2013) by the Uganda Police Force.

In a statement issued last Friday, Ms Brenda Kugonza, the coordinator of the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Uganda (NCHRD-U), said despite heavy deployment, police failed to take appropriate action to restrain the mob.

"The seemingly unbothered conduct of the police is a clear abdication of duty to ensure public safety for all Ugandans," the statement read in part.

The sanctity of the courts, they said, must be protected. "If they fail to do so, they must account," the coalition adds.

Mr Hassan Shire, the executive director of East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, accused the police of failure to act appropriately.

"Police should apply the law equally even if the subject is one of their own," Mr Shire said.

They also asked government to investigate the circumstances behind the obstruction of the August 10 court proceedings and take appropriate action.

What the law says

According to Articles 16 to 18 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, the State should guarantee the functioning of lawyers. "The UPF's stance as a rowdy crowd threatened officers of court is not only a threat to the rule of law but also a hindrance to the progress of justice in the country," said Ms Sheila Muwanga, Deputy Director of FHRI.