

# REJECT POLITICS OF FEAR, POLICE BOSS TELLS UGANDANS

By Agnes Nantambi

The Deputy Inspector General of Police, Maj. Gen. Paul Lokech, has accused people aligned to the opposition party, the National Unity Platform (NUP), of being behind the malicious audio and video stay-at-home messages intended to cause fear and panic.

Lokech, while addressing the media at Police headquarters, Naguru, a Kampala suburb, yesterday, urged people to reject the politics of fear.

However, NUP has denied the allegations.

At the media briefing, Lokech said the Police is aware of the groups and individuals promoting panic and fear through malicious video footages and audios, to purposely intimidate and prevent people from conducting normal businesses or reporting for work on the February 3 to 7, 2021.

The audios and videos, according to Lokech, ask people to stay in their homes, stock food and threaten all persons who will defy the alleged stay-at-home orders.

"The authors who are allegedly aligned to NUP indicate how the protests will transition into a mass uprising, including the use of external forces to attack government," he stated.

"This development by NUP of marshalling fear to rally support for street violence and civil uprising, for their selfish political advantage is not new to us. It was used by the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) in the aftermath of the 2011 and 2016 general elections. Therefore, for politicians to spread this kind of negative propaganda across the country is trying to provoke people to incite violence," he said.

"Interestingly, it is the same NUP that has petitioned the Supreme Court; (they have) resorted to fearmongering about the possibility of targeted attacks on security and other Ugandans, who are against such plans of impunity and lawlessness. The public should be aware of how previous attempts by NUP to hold protests, were accompanied by riots, massive acts of looting, threats to many people's lives and robbery, among others," Lokech said.

"We are taking these threats



PHOTO BY RONNIE KIJJAMBU

Lokech with Byekwaso at the press briefing at Naguru, Kampala, yesterday

## NATIONAL UNITY PLATFORM REACTS

NUP leaders, including Robert Kyagulanyi, have persistently denied inciting violence and have insisted they are non-violent.

Contacted for comment on the matter, Joel Senyonyi, the National Unity Platform party spokesperson, said none

of the party leaders has informed the public of the alleged intended plan to destabilise the city.

"We do not have any information regarding our party members or leaders being part of that," Ssenyonyi pointed out.

seriously and would like to assure the public, that they should not be intimidated against going about their lawful businesses, because their security and safety is guaranteed," Lokech added.

"We call upon all Ugandans to reject such politics of fear. The over-whelming majority of Ugandans made their voices to be heard during the recent general election," he said.

"They now want to live in peace and dignity, without the fear of restricting their movement and uncertainty about what will follow. Many have families, others have to go to work, look for school fees, pay taxes and they deserve the right to live without fear. Let those not convinced go to courts of law, other than inciting others to cause chaos," he said.

"We urge them to watch out for any culprits planning to burn tyres and attack other Ugandans going about their normal businesses."

Lokech also warned that Police would withdraw bodyguards from Very Important Persons (VIPs) who are misusing them.

"We have proved that some of our leaders are misusing their escorts; nobody is above the law and no one should misuse the officers allocated to guard them to intimidate other Ugandans," warned Lokech.

He was responding to queries from journalists about the alleged misuse of escorts in Mukono district by one of the government officials.

Lokech explained that escorts are meant to protect the officers and nothing else.

"We have discovered that others make them carry their bags, hold babies while others use them to intimidate fellow Ugandans, this will not be accepted," he said.

Lokech also warned VIPs over using sirens pretending to be having the right of way, saying this disrupts traffic.

He said it is only the President, the Vice-President, the ambulances and the fire cars with the right of way, but must also have respect for other road users.

On reports of alleged abduction of people in parts of the country, Lokech said he has instructed the head of CID to investigate the allegations and ensure that the victims are produced in courts of law within 48 hours.

Lokech, however, said some of those who were arrested are being held at Wakiso Police Station.

At the same press briefing, Brig. Gen. Flavia Byekwaaso, the Uganda People's Defence Forces spokesperson, urged the public to jointly celebrate the 40 years of NRA/UPDF existence in Uganda.

She said as part of the Tarehe Sita activities, the President will commission the Army Referral Hospital in Mbuya, on Saturday.

## Investigate election-related rights abusers, say lawyers

By Nelson Kiva

A group of human rights lawyers have asked government to investigate and prosecute cases of human rights violations allegedly committed during the recently concluded elections.

At a media briefing convened at the offices of LASPNET, a legal aid service providers' network, in Kampala yesterday, the advocates alleged that the weeks leading up to the elections were characterised by widespread violence and human rights abuses.

President Yoweri Museveni was declared the winner of the elections by the Electoral Commission (EC) chairperson, Justice Simon Byabakama on January 16. Museveni got 6,042,898 (58.38%) of the votes while the first runner-up Robert Kyagulanyi garnered 3,631,437 (35.08%).

According to the advocates, the alleged human rights abuses undermined the elections from meeting the benchmarks of free and fair polls.

The chief executive officer of LASPNET, Dr Sylvia Namubiru, while delivering a report on the impact of the 2021 general election on human rights, access to justice and rule of law in Uganda, said they have offered free legal aid to over 500 people whose rights were violated in the course of their participation in the election.

"The network's legal rapid response lawyers have been vigilant and able to handle several matters or cases related to election offences and human rights violations. A total of 511 (425 men and 86 women) have been supported to access justice," she said.

She said the LASPNET and its members documented election incidences and had a call centre before, during and after elections.

This was in addition to deploying 80 rapid response lawyers and paralegals.

"Whereas we agree with the reports from the media, accredited election observers and UHRC that the elections were generally peaceful with majority of Ugandans having had an opportunity to exercise their right to vote, the network, through its interventions, documented various incidents of human rights violations," she said. The violations, according to Namubiru, ranged from kidnaps, arrests and beating of opposition supporters and journalists,



Dr Sylvia Namubiru

disruption of opposition rallies and enforced disappearances.

"The Government should ensure thorough investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the abuses," Namubiru said.

The shut-down of social media and the Internet was a violation of human rights, the lawyers insisted.

Two days before the January 14 polls, the Government ordered internet service providers to block access to social media. The next day, there was total Internet shut-down, which was only lifted five days after the election.



**Kampala Police spokesperson said their views should have been sought in the report**

However, UHRC has since concurred with government that it was done in the interest of the country's security, though it infringed on the rights of Ugandans.

Arthur Nsereko, the board chairperson of the network, asked Government to take deliberate measures to protect the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. They also called on UHRC to document all human rights violations and make a report to Parliament.

Denying opportunity to the aspirants to consult Ugandans before campaigns, according to lawyer Luyimbanzi Nalukoola was another violation.

"The organisation should have shared the report with us before we can comment on it from the media," Patrick Onyango, the Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson, said.