

JOINT CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT ON BREAK INS

Joint Civil Society Press Statement on Break ins of offices of Civil Society Organizations

23 May 2016

Uganda government should immediately take steps to end pattern of office break-ins

10 Ugandan civil society organisations urge the government of Uganda to conduct swift and transparent investigations the recent wave of office break-ins targeting human rights organisations and take steps to put an end to the practice.

On 22 May 2016, the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) offices were broken into and the guard on duty was beaten to death. The offices of the Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director broken into and left ransacked, and an unknown number of documents were taken. Other valuable items, such as laptops and other electronics, were left in the offices.

“We are deeply concerned about the series of break-ins that have targeted civil society organisations lately. The Ugandan government should ensure that those responsible for the brutal murder of HRAFP’s guard and the burglary are found and held accountable, and take steps to end this pattern of break-ins,” said Sheila Muwanga, Deputy Director of the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative.

On 10 April 2016, unknown assailants attempted to break into the offices of Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U) after sedating their guard. HRNJ-Uganda was last broken into on 29 June 2015, when robbers stole computers, valuable documents, cash and other property reportedly worth 45 million Ugandan shillings. Police investigations were inconclusive.

Between 2013 and 2014, the NGO Forum reported that at least 26 NGO offices were broken into. The Foundation for Human Rights Initiative and DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) were also broken into in 2014, and had organisational documents searched and valuable goods stolen. Although police conducted investigations, these remained inconclusive.

“It is of concern that assailants do not only look for valuable goods, but also steal confidential organisational documents. This indicates that the break-ins are not random, but target human rights organisations specifically,” said Nicholas Opiyo, Executive Director of Chapter Four.

The government of Uganda should ensure that human rights organisations work in a free and safe environment, immediately take steps to find those responsible for this latest break-in – which regrettably resulted in loss of life – and investigate this extremely worrying pattern affecting human rights organisations in Uganda.

Chapter Four Uganda

DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)

Defenders Protection Initiative

Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI)

Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum

Human Rights Center Uganda

Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda

Human Rights Network Uganda

Legal Aid Service Providers Network

National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Uganda

Sexual Minorities Uganda