

UGANDA WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE

Over the last few weeks, we have witnessed a series of disturbing events in which we have seen the State and its law enforcement agencies respond in a brutal and often excessive manner to citizens' demands for government action to address increased prices, cost of living, growing poverty, inequality in distribution of resources and corruption.

During this period, the Police and other security agencies have sought to quell demonstrations under the '*Walk to Work*' Campaign using live ammunition and copious amounts of tear gas resulting in the loss of life, injuries to persons, and destruction of property. We have seen our sisters, brothers, and children affected in various ways with many still nursing injuries in hospital and others arrested and imprisoned, some without charge. In some incidences, sections of the public have exploited the volatile situation to break the law further spawning a downward spiral of violence both in Kampala and in other towns upcountry.

The shooting to death of two year old **Juliana Nalwanga** in Masaka, seven-month pregnant Ms. **Nalwendo** in the stomach and the brutal arrest and treatment of demonstrators and some bystanders are but some of the horrific incidents that have shocked us and invoked unease and a range of reactions from various sections of Uganda's population and international actors including the Inter Religious Council, the Uganda Law Society and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

While the State has a duty to ensure law and order, the State is also obliged to respect, promote, protect, and fulfill the rights of its citizens as enshrined in the 1995 Constitution and other regional and international treaties to which Uganda is a signatory.¹ In attempting to fulfill its obligations in the last few weeks, the State has instead used excessive force resulting in the infringement of some of the fundamental rights enshrined in Chapter 4 of the Constitution including the right to life, the freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, right to access prompt, fair and timely justice and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment.

We are also deeply concerned about the suffering that has been occasioned by the escalating food and fuel prices. Many women, men and children are subsequently unable to meet their basic needs and enjoy their basic right to food, education, health and shelter. While we recognize the myriad of causes behind the current crisis, we also wish to express our profound

¹These treaties include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, the African Charter on Human And Peoples' Rights and the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights in Africa

disappointment with government's indifference, exhibited by the lack of urgent action to curb the situation and apparent disregard of pressing priorities in allocation of government expenditure.

We as **Women in Civil Society** are hereby convening to register our deep concern and condemnation on the use of excessive force by the Police and other security agencies and subsequent escalating violence and to call upon the State to take critical measures to address the key issues/ concerns raised by the public so as to avert a national crisis. In particular, we wish to register our deep concern of:

1. The use of excessive force and especially the use of live ammunition to quell demonstrations, indiscriminate physical assaults on civilians, spraying of vast amounts of tear gas in closed spaces including cars, schools, dispensaries and homes occasioning loss of life and property, severe injuries and pain among innocent children, by standers, those at work and urban dwellers. We are greatly concerned that rather than enjoy state protection, citizens are preoccupied with defending themselves against its wrath;
2. The brutality of officers of the Uganda Police Force and other security operatives in handling the "Walk to Work" campaign which amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment for those that were arrested;
3. The intimidation of human rights defenders who have spoken out on various issues of concern including the declining space for engagement;
4. Censorship of the media and a curtailing of press freedom and freedom of expression, including intimidation and security threats to journalists and media houses carrying out their duty as a watchdog of the state and provider of information to the public;
5. the increased erosion of the independence of the three arms of government and lack of . The actions and decisions of some judicial officers which cast doubt in the minds of the public on whether justice is being done. We are equally concerned that contrary to the public appeal for the perpetrators of violence to be brought to justice, the Minister for Internal Affairs has instead defended the use of brutal force. Such responses from government risk promoting impunity.
6. The increased militarization of the State and use of armed forces to enforce law and order and quell peaceful protests which heightens risks of violent conflict and will affect the entire population of Uganda including men, women and children.

We as women's civil society organisations are calling upon the Government to respect, promote, protect, and fulfill the rights of its citizens as enshrined in

the 1995 Constitution and exercise restraint in fulfilling its obligations. Government must recognize that the language of force and violence alienates more than 50% of Uganda's population – the women and diminishes our initiative to exercise our civic duties within the public sphere;

We are calling upon Government to take proactive measures to address broader social justice issues, and ensure that key concerns voiced by various sections of the public are addressed. We demand for strong policy measures to address issues food security, unemployment, health and education. We also demand for government's resolve to ensure greater transparency in the allocation and management of public resources, reduction of excessive government expenditure and equitable distribution of benefits of economic growth to all the citizens of Uganda.

We are formally submitting an appeal to the Government and to the International Community through the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights defenders (UNSR) requesting for **thorough, prompt and impartial investigations into the human rights violations committed by the security forces.**

Finally, we are calling upon the public to remain peaceful in the pursuit of various rights and to desist from violent actions. We are also calling for national dialogue between key parties and urge all stakeholders including the regional and international community to intervene in ensuring peace and justice prevails in Uganda.

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