

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

Public Statement

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KAMPALA: EHAHRD-Net CONCERNED ABOUT STIFLING OF THE MEDIA IN UGANDA

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net) is concerned about recent attempts by the Government of Uganda to restrict freedom of expression. The arrest on the 26th April 2008 of Andrew Mwenda - Editor of The Independent biweekly magazine, together with two of his colleagues and media reports about Government's plans to increase restrictions on the media are a worrying trend. EHAHRD-Net notes that there already exist restrictive laws infringing upon media freedom in particular Sections 39 and 40 of the Penal Code which provide for Sedition as a criminal offence which put in question the Government's commitment to democratic principles and respect of basic freedoms enshrined in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

According to a statement released by Human Rights Network Uganda (HURINET), a founding member of the EHAHRD-Net dated the 23rd May 2008; these incidents amount to worrisome interference with media freedom by the State and constitute a breach of fundamental and basic rights and freedoms which are universal, interdependent and inalienable.

The Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), the Network's focal point in Uganda, in its recent open letter to the Third Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Information and National Guidance, Hon. Ali Kirunda Kivejinja dated the 26th May 2008, expressed concern about the continuing restrictions on the media which has greatly affected the media's ability to impart information as effectively as their role demands.

"Restrictions on the media which exist under Uganda's legal system are unacceptable and so are the attempts by the state machinery to impose additional barriers to media freedom. Suppression of the freedom of expression is a clear abuse of state power and should not be allowed to go on unchallenged", says Hassan Shire Sheikh, Chairperson of EHAHRD/Net.

APPEAL:

EHAHRD-Net appeals to the Government of Uganda to refrain from harassment, arrest and detention of human rights defenders, i.e. journalists and media practitioners;

The Government of Uganda should respect and adhere to provisions of the 1995 Constitution which in Article 29 provides for freedom of speech and expression. The Government should further ensure that laws are in line with the constitutional provisions and international law.

The Network calls upon the international community to join the campaign to exert pressure on the Ugandan Government to remove all restrictions on the media, cease all attempts to impose additional restrictions and guarantee freedom of expression.

All Network members are encouraged to further this appeal. Write to:

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