



**JOINT PRESS STATEMENT BY THE  
COALITION AGAINST TORTURE (CAT)  
AND THE UGANDA HUMAN RIGHTS  
COMMISSION (UHRC) ON THE  
COMMEMORATION OF THE UN DAY IN  
SUPPORT OF TORTURE VICTIMS –  
26<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2024**

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**WEDNESDAY, 19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024  
UHRC HEADQUARTERS**

The Uganda Human Rights Commission and the Coalition Against Torture in Uganda chaired by the African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV) jointly issue this statement under the theme: ***"Torture Free Communities for All"***.

Every year, on June 26th, the world observes the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. This day enables annual reflection about the progress made by both state and non-state actors towards the prevention and protection from Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

It is also dedicated towards continued awareness raising, supporting victims and promoting accountability on the part of the duty bearers.

The Coalition Against Torture (CAT) members and the UHRC are committed to all efforts towards sustained action in combating torture so that we can attain Torture Free Communities for All.

This year's theme emphasizes our goal to create safe and humane environments free from torture. It highlights the necessity of collaborative efforts towards eradicating torture and building communities where all persons in their diversity are safe from inhuman treatment.

### **SITUATION IN UGANDA**

As with all other fundamental human rights, Uganda has taken essential steps towards guaranteeing this freedom though more still needs to be done to attain full enjoyment/realization of this freedom. From the ratification and signing of the UN Convention Against Torture, the passing of the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act and accompanying regulations to empowering institutions like Courts, the Police, the Directorate of Public Prosecution and the UHRC to deal with complaints of torture and providing an enabling environment for non-state actors like



ACTV, Women Human Rights Defenders Uganda (WHRD-U), Chapter 4 Uganda, Human Rights Center Uganda (HRCU), Rights for Her; among others to perform a supportive role to state institutions, this is a testament to the progressive realization of this right.

Over the past year (June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to date) we have seen a growing interest by the general public in combating torture through using the relevant Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) like phones and digital-based application to expose the culprits. For example around April 20<sup>th</sup>, there was a video circulating online of one Shakira Naula who was tied up and flogged by her Muslim family members for praying in a Pentecostal church. This happened at Bugolya Parish, Kadama Sub-County in Kibuku district. Another video circulated at the beginning of last month (May 2<sup>nd</sup>) showing a lady being burnt by a group of men using a melting jerry can. She was later identified by Police as Muhirwe Kolodina, 28, a resident of Namuzikiza village in Kikandwa Sub-county – Mityana district. About a week ago another video of an 18-year-old Isaac Kitooke circulated showing him confined in between iron bars and being flogged with cables by a security guard from a building in Nakivubo in Kampala. In all these incidents, the Police swung into action and arrested the perpetrators for which we commend them.

The capturing of such videos and the attention they normally attract coupled with the increasing number of online users who dedicate their platforms to highlighting human rights violations in general, is a demonstration that the general public is increasingly becoming conscious of their human rights and freedoms. It is also a wake-up call to all duty bearers and other human rights activists to give these issues the due attention required.

We therefore wish in a special way to appreciate the Uganda Police Force for their increased vigilance and always coming in time to arrest the



perpetrators like it did in the three incidents listed above and whenever such videos appear online. We also commend government for facilitating access to internet and other ICTs as evidenced in the National Budget presented to Parliament last week.

### **Redress mechanism**

Torture is a crime as well as a violation of human rights. Our past two Annual Reports; that is, the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Reports on the State of Human Rights in the Country, show increasing cases of torture committed by private individuals. ACTV have equally noted a persistent rise in torture related complaints registered against private individuals; that is, 103 complaints in 2018, 394 complaints in 2019, 104 complaints in 2020, 166 complaints in 2021, 136 complaints in 2022 and 150 in 2023 making a total of 1,053 complaints. This calls for more civic education and sensitization targeting the public, as well as more vigilance by the Police to enforce the law.

We acknowledge that gaps exist in effective documentation and investigation of cases of torture. We observed for example the Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports of 2021, 2022 and 2023<sup>1</sup> did not report any complaints of torture received against either private adult citizens or sister security agencies. However the reports record torture against children; “child torture”<sup>2</sup> which is commendable.

Funding challenges have continued to affect the UHRC’s investigations effort as evidenced in the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Report where only 6 torture reported complaints were investigated in 2023; 2 in Gulu and 4 in Central region.

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<sup>1</sup> Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports 2021, 2022 and 2023.

<sup>2</sup> The 2022 and 2023 Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports registered a total of 59,681 crimes; 28,419 crimes in 2022 and 31,262 crimes in 2023 respectively. The African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV) registered a total of 1,223 torture related complaints against the Uganda Police Force from 2018 to 2022;

Some of the circumstances of torture reported were; Punishment, Forced confession, disarmament process, Rebel atrocities, Election violence, Gender Based Violence, Land wrangles, Extraction of information, intimidation and sowing fear.

### **KEY STRIDES MADE:**

Following the UNCAT 2022 recommendations to Uganda in November 2022 at the 75<sup>th</sup> Session in Geneva, joint efforts have been taken by the State and CSOs to address the concerns around gaps in documentation by duty bearers and ignorance about the response mechanisms among the rights holders.

- Discussions regarding rehabilitation indicators, standards and rehabilitation policy were initiated with the relevant departments within the Ministry of Health in September 2023 and December 2023 with the department of rehabilitation and disability and department on mental health and non-communicable diseases respectively. This will foster MOU discussions with the Ministry and avail ACTV a platform to engage on issues regarding policy and standards for quality rehabilitation for survivors of torture.
- ACTV together with the Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) and Uganda Police Force Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) developed a checklist on effective investigation and documentation of torture. It has since been utilised during capacity building engagements with state prosecutors and Police.
- Security agencies following the UNCAT November 2022 recommendations to Uganda have implemented the recommendation on capacity building of the security agencies like Uganda Police Force's CID directorate and the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) on the 2017 Regulations and the PPTA 2012. The UPDF Tokoora division has undergone four trainings; two in September



2023 and two in December 2023 due to joint collaboration with ACTV, the UPDF human rights directorate. The same has been implemented by the Uganda Police Force's Criminal Investigations Directorate for the CIDs in Northern region and in the Eastern Region on the application of Form 4 of the 2017 regulations.

- Two consultative meetings have been held by the Uganda Human Rights Commission regarding the Witness Protection Bill in the bid to have this bill passed into law. The absence of a witness protection law affects access to justice by survivors of torture as majority fear to report due to the risk of retribution.
- The UHRC tribunal awarded a total of UGX 74,500,000 shillings in 2023 to victims of the violation of the freedom from torture.
- In 2023, the ACTV reached a total of 1,235 survivors of torture.

## **CALL TO ACTION**

**Security Agencies** should continue with regular training programmes for their personnel on Human Rights standards and Anti-torture laws and a module on trauma informed approach in investigations.

**Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs** should allocate financial resources to a compensation fund for torture victims or survivors annually to enable timely receipt of compensatory awards.

**Parliament** should consider enacting the Witness Protection Bill 2015, the National Legal Aid Bill and the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill into law to foster human rights protection and access to justice.

**Ministry of Health** should consider developing and adopting a policy on rehabilitation for victims and survivors of torture. This will improve documentation and aid access to justice.

**Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (ODPP)** should consider capacity building for state prosecutors on effective investigation and documentation of torture related complaints manual.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs** should consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture; conducting benchmarking visits or stakeholder engagements with countries in Africa like Mali, Mauritius, Rwanda, Morocco, Mozambique, Ghana, Cameroon, Comoros, South Africa and Togo which have ratified the OPCAT. These countries have gone ahead to constitute their National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) as National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs).

### **SUMMARY OF THE KEY ACTIVITIES TO BE CARRIED OUT**

As we gear up to the main commemoration, the following are the activities lined for this year UN Day in Support of Torture Victims

1. A Joint UHRC-CAT Press Conference on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (which we are holding right now).
2. Media activities from 17<sup>th</sup> to 26 June 2024 like: TV & Radio talk shows, X space, social media campaigns, Newspaper pull out, info-text SMS messages about torture and where to report, TV and Radio Spot messages.
3. On 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024; community dialogues will be held in Kaabong and Gulu districts in Northern Uganda.
4. The main Commemoration will be held at Railway Grounds in Kampala and will involve; a Marching procession accompanied by the Uganda Prisons Band and the Chief Walker/Guest is the Hon.



Minister for Internal Affairs Maj. Gen. Kahinda Otafiire. There will also be a service and exhibition camps on the sideline to enable the general public receive free legal and psycho-social services, file human rights-related complaints and receive general knowledge on human rights as speeches will be going on.

We extend our appreciation to the USAID under the "Stop Torture Activity 2023-2027" and the Danish Institute Against Torture (DIGNITY) for their financial support towards this commemoration in Uganda. Special appreciation also goes to our local partners under the CAT; namely:- The ACTV, Uganda Law Society (ULS), HRCU, Chapter4 Uganda, WHRD-U among others for the concerted effort towards a successful commemoration.



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Ms. Mariam Wangadya  
**CHAIRPERSON (UHRC)**



Mr. Samuel Herbert Nsubuga  
**CHAIRPERSON (CAT)**