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For Immediate Release

UGANDA EDITORS' GUILD PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE ESCALATING VIOLATIONS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA FREEDOMS IN UGANDA

The Uganda Editors Guild (UEG) expresses grave concern over the persistent and escalating attacks on the freedom of expression and the rights of journalists in the independent media. These attacks undermine the constitutional order and threaten democratic governance, particularly as the nation approaches the general elections.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

Article 29(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, guarantees every person the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information. This right, though subject to certain reasonable restrictions under Article 43, remains sacrosanct and vital for democracy, transparency, and accountability.

Moreover, Uganda is a State Party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) under Article 9, which protects the right to freedom of expression, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) under Article 19, which safeguards free expression and access to information.

Incidents undermining media freedom

Despite these constitutional and international protections, we observe the following serious violations:

1. Ban on coverage involving the President and NRM: Since March 2025, Nation Media Group Uganda (NMG-U) has been arbitrarily barred from covering events related to President Yoweri Museveni and the ruling National Resistance Movement. This exclusion violates the constitutional right to information and amounts to unlawful censorship (see Constitution, Article 29(1)(a)).

2. Unlawful denial of parliamentary coverage: On October 28, 2025, NMG-U journalists were unjustifiably prevented from covering a parliamentary session without any valid explanation. Parliamentary authorities' failure to intervene breaches legal duties to uphold press freedom and transparency in public affairs (Parliamentary Rules of Procedure, and constitutional principles).

3. Security agents' intimidation: The targeting and forced withdrawal of independent media journalists during the Kawempe North parliamentary by-election constitute intimidation and a breach of press freedom safeguards under the Constitution and internationally recognised standards (see UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression reports).

4. Denial of accreditation: Parliament's refusal to accredit NMG-U journalists for the June 2025 State of the Nation Address is a direct violation of media rights and undermines democratic openness (Constitution Article 29(1)(a)).

5. Arbitrary tax assessments: The imposition of unfair tax liabilities and demands for taxes from third parties appear designed to harass and financially destabilise *The Observer*, contrary to principles of due process and fair administrative action under the Tax Procedures Code Act, 2014. Other media houses appear to have also been targeted in this manner.

6. Break-in and theft at The Observer Offices: The October 9, 2025, break-in targeting editorial equipment, including computers and hard drives essential for journalistic work, constitutes a criminal offense under the Penal Code Act (cap. 120), including burglary and theft. The absence of police transparency in investigations violates the right to security and effective remedy (Constitution Articles 23 and 44).

Calls to Action

In light of these violations and in defence of constitutional democracy, we demand that:

- All authorities immediately cease discriminatory restrictions on independent media and journalists.
- A thorough and transparent investigation be conducted into the October 9 break-in at The Observer and all other intimidatory acts, with prompt public disclosure of findings and accountability for the perpetrators.
- Government institutions uphold the constitutional guarantee to freedom of expression and guarantee journalists' safety and unrestricted access to public information.
- Relevant security agencies, Parliament, and regulatory bodies engage in an inclusive dialogue with media stakeholders to restore an enabling environment for journalistic independence.
- International and domestic human rights mechanisms monitor Uganda's compliance with freedom of expression standards, especially during the ongoing electoral period, and beyond.

Failure to swiftly address these infringements risks undermining Uganda's democratic integrity and constitutional governance.

We reaffirm our commitment to transparent and principled dialogue aimed at upholding the rule of law, human rights, and press freedom in Uganda.

Signed at Kampala on this 29th day of October 2025.

UGANDA EDITORS' GUILD

Editor's Note:

The Uganda Editors' Guild is the apex convening body for the country's newsroom leaders across all media platforms, with a vision to foster professional and viable media that effectively contribute to building a prosperous and democratic society.

Its mission is to contribute towards deepening media independence and press freedom in the country and beyond, by bringing together senior editors, scholars of journalism and media studies for fraternity, networking, fellowship and leadership.

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