

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

Ref.: AL UGA 6/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

19 December 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/4, 54/14, 52/9, 52/4 and 59/5.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **allegations of the use of disproportionate and unnecessary force by security forces during electoral campaigns, enforced disappearances, threats and intimidation of journalists, human rights defenders and restrictions to press freedom, across Uganda in the past year and ahead of the general elections scheduled to start on 15 January 2026.**

Concerns regarding human rights violations against individuals and civil society actors in Uganda on the basis of perceived support or affiliation with the political opposition are not new and have been the subject of several communications by several Special Procedures mandate holders, including UGA 5/2025; UGA 2/2025; UGA 6/2022; UGA 4/2021; UGA 3/2021; UGA 1/2021; UGA 5/2020; UGA 4/2020; UGA 3/2020; UGA 3/2019. We regret that we have not received a reply from your Excellency's government to any of these allegation letters.

According to the information received:

In 2025, over 550 members and supporters of the main opposition party, the National Unity Platform (NUP), including at least 50 women, have reportedly been arrested across Uganda due to their actual or perceived political belief and charged with various offences under the Penal Code Act ranging from unlawful assembly to common nuisance and incitement to violence. Of these 550, over 300 individuals, including at least 23 women and one minor, have been arrested since the Presidential candidates' nomination in September 2025, mainly in Kampala, Lira, Arua, Mbarara and Gulu because of their participation in the NUP's campaign.

There have been reports that approximately 60 individuals associated with NUP have been kept unlawfully in detention including nine of them having been in detention for over four years.

We received reports that since the electoral campaign kicked off, heavy security forces have been deployed in most locations where the NUP is scheduled to hold rallies, disrupting and obstructing of the planned campaign. Police and security operatives, including in civilian clothes, have excessively resorted to non-lethal weapons including chemical irritants, whips, batons, canes and water cannons. The indiscriminate use of teargas was reportedly attributed to stampedes in Kawempe division of Kampala and Kayunga district on 24 and 27 November 2025, leaving an unconfirmed number of people injured.

On 28 November 2025, a NUP electoral campaign rally was scheduled in Iganga district. At around 5:00 pm, following the end of the party president's speech at Railway Grounds in Iganga district, a confrontation reportedly started, when party supporters defied the directive of security officers to leave the rally venue. Security forces responded by firing live ammunition against them at close range. This incident resulted in the death of one man and the injuries of several others.

On 6 December 2025, a group of security officers, largely in military uniform, indiscriminately and violently assaulted with "long sticks" NUP supporters including the party presidential candidate, Mr. Robert Kyaguranyi Ssentamu, (also known as Bobi Wine) on their way to the venue for an electoral campaign rally in Gulu city.

There has reportedly been a climate of fear in Uganda prior to the 2026 elections. Which also stems from previously observed patterns linked to the 2021 elections. In 2021 there have been at least 18 confirmed cases of NUP supporters who were forcibly disappeared with the reported involvement of the Ugandan Police Force and the military. These individuals range from 18 to 45 years of age and had either participated in protests, voiced their support for NUP leaders or simply expressed opposition to the Government. The authorities in public official statements have repeatedly denied these cases, claiming that these individuals have left the country to join rebel groups or engaged in illegal activities without substantiating these claims. As such, in the lead up to the 2026 elections, previous patterns have been reported in Kampala, such as several crowd control vehicles, including water cannons, have been permanently deployed in streets, roundabouts and important intersections with an apparent preventive objective without responding to a specific situation.

In addition, in 2025, at least 50 NUP members and supporters were reportedly subjected to enforced disappearance, and for some their fate and whereabouts remained unknown for months. Similarly, several others were forcibly disappeared, apparently in direct connection to their political views. According to the information received, only in 2025, close to 167 cases of enforced disappearances occurred. In many of these cases the special security police is involved in enforced disappearances and the local police are often aware.

The Government has reportedly continuously resorted to using unmarked vehicles, commonly known as "drones", to arbitrarily detain opposition party members and supporters and keep them in incommunicado detention at unidentified locations or unauthorized places of detention known as "safe houses". Individuals have reportedly been detained for varying periods of time,

from hours to months. The use of “ungazetted” detention facilities was also revealed by two Kenyan human rights defenders recently released after having spent more than a month forcibly disappeared , who claimed that 150 people were held at the military facility.

It is also reported that the Government has not enforced expeditiously the Supreme Court’s ruling of 31 January 2025 regarding the trial of civilians by military courts, which ordered the transfer of all pending cases from military courts to civilian ones with competent jurisdiction.

We also received reports that the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act, 2022 has been used to stifle dissent, particularly by TikTokers and online activists. In 2024-2025, at least 17 persons, all men, were arrested and charged with offences under the Act as a result of their remarks against President Museveni, his family members and the Speaker of Parliament.

In 2025, journalists have also continuously been subjected to, or at heightened risk of being subjected to, various types of physical assaults, intimidation and harassment both online and offline. We were informed that during the Kawempe North by-election in March 2025, at least 32 journalists and media workers, including three women, were either assaulted by security operatives or their equipment confiscated or damaged. In October 2025, “The Observer” newspaper’s office was ransacked, resulting in 12 computers being stolen. In addition, in recent months, the Uganda Communication Commission (UCC) suspended several radio stations and programmes including Boona FM and Salt TV (“Omusunsuzi”) for breaching broadcasting standards known as “minimum broadcasting standards” under the UCC Act. Such standards make reference to content needing to be “not contrary to public morality” and “not likely to create public insecurity or violence”, which are vague and subjective terms which can have multiple interpretations. Moreover, the requirement for news contents linked to national security needing to be verified prior to broadcasting create significant obstacles for journalists and media practitioners considering limited access to information. On 28 and 29 October 2025, reporters of the Nation Media Group-owned NTV Uganda and the Daily Monitor were denied access to Parliament and their accreditation withdrawn, reportedly because of critical articles on “unopposed” culture within the Parliament including the re-election of both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Parliament.

In 2025, civil society organizations have also been subjected to unlawful restrictions to their operations. Especially worrisome have been the delays on the renewal of operation permits and then the subsequent freeze of accounts due to the lack of a renewed permit. We have also received reports about the difficulties of operating once the permits are issued or renewed due to the obligation to sign onerous memoranda of understanding (MoU) with the districts in which the association wishes to operate. In some districts, the MoU are allegedly being weaponized by local governments in order to restrict the operation of associations critical of local policies and decisions. We have also received information about the impossibility for organizations working on sexual orientation and gender identity to be registered and even of administrative harassment of organizations which work with lesbian, gay,

bisexual, trans, and other gender-diverse (LGBT) people. According to information received, there have been discussions to increase regulations for CSOs receiving foreign funding. In the context of massively defunding of CSOs, including by the lack of national funding sources, such decision would deeply affect the survival of the sector.

Besides, several reports were received about unlawful digital surveillance of human rights defenders, activists and civil society leaders. Phones have been reported to be hacked and infected with malware and spyware, and digital car plates have been tracked, which are creating a chilling effect on beneficiaries and collaborators, affecting deeply the possibility for civil society organizations and other associations to advance in their objectives and conduct their activities.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we express serious concerns at the allegations of human rights violations and the curtailment of the exercise of fundamental freedoms by security forces and Ugandan authorities across Uganda. The excessive use of force, including firearms and the misuse of less lethal weapons against people participating in peaceful assemblies not only accounts as violations of the rights of freedom of assembly and of association, it also creates a chilling effect on the exercise of these rights as well as the rights to freedom of expression and of participation in public affairs ahead of the elections, and leads to the shrinking of civic space in the country.

In particular, the heavy-handed deployment of crowd control vehicles, including teargas and water cannons, without need could deter the organization of assemblies in the future. The Human Rights Committee in its general comment No.37 specifies that when less-lethal weapons such as teargas are used, “all reasonable efforts should be made to limit risks, such as causing a stampede or harming bystanders. Such weapons should be used only as a measure of last resort, following a verbal warning, and with adequate opportunity given for assembly participants to disperse”. As is mentioned in the UN Human Rights Guidance on the Use of Less Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement, “water cannon should only be used in situations of serious public disorder where there is a significant likelihood of loss of life, serious injury or the widespread destruction of property. In order to meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality, the deployment of teargas and water cannon should be carefully planned and should be managed with rigorous command and control at a senior level”.

We express our dismay at the alleged use of disproportionate and unnecessary force by security forces against individuals perceived to be supporters and members of the political opposition, which has resulted in the loss of a life and injuries to various people. We also express our concern at the alleged arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as enforced disappearances of opposition members and civil society activists. In this regard, we first remind the authorities that the State remains responsible for the acts of State agents if they act in that capacity, “even if it exceeds its authority or contravenes instructions” (see article 7 of the Articles on State Responsibility for Internationally Wrongful Acts). We also wish to recall the study of the Working Group on enforced disappearance on enforced disappearances and elections (A/HRC/57/54/Add.4), which raises concern about the enforced disappearances of journalists and human rights defenders, who among other actors have diverse roles in elections and warns that pre and post elections violence against them appear to aim at silencing dissent. In this

regard, States are recommended to establish a solid legal framework for the prevention and punishment of enforced disappearances, including in the electoral context (para 73).

We are also alarmed about the reported physical attacks, intimidation and harassment of journalists and media outlets, which constitutes an assault on media freedom, the right to information and freedom of expression more broadly and precludes the public from receiving and accessing plural and diverse information, vital for any democracy and especially critical in electoral contexts.

We would like to express our deep concern about the perceived targeting of opposition members and supporters, which has had an impact on their ability to organise and participate in the political process.

With regards to potential internet or social media shutdowns, which took place in previous electoral contexts in Uganda, we recall that blanket social media or internet shutdowns are never justified or compatible with international human rights law, including the right to freedom of expression under article 19 ICCPR, as they do not comply with the requirements of necessity and proportionality required by international law due to their indiscriminate nature. In her recent report, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression called on States to “refrain from blocking platforms or websites, as such disruptions are inherently disproportionate” (A/80/341, para. 109)

As the Special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and of association (A/HRC/59/44) and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of freedom of opinion and expression (A/HRC/59/50) indicated in their reports presented in 2025 to the Human Rights Council these rights are fundamental to any democracy and are prerequisites for guaranteeing free, fair, credible and participatory elections.

Greater tolerance of peaceful assembly is required during elections and the reported use of force, often as the first choice, and the wide, indiscriminate use of crowd control weapons suggest an intentional crackdown on dissent and political participation. Closing the space for people to raise their concerns and repression of peaceful protests and political rallies could risk sparking electoral violence. Besides, ensuring an enabling policy and institutional framework guaranteeing the exercise of fundamental freedoms without discrimination based on political views or other grounds is a key prerequisite for genuine and violence-free elections. Electoral processes and legislation should enable participation for all groups and be devised in a timely manner to allow for inclusive consultations. Also, considering the high tensions during elections and the importance of ensuring a safe and enabling space for political dialogue, law enforcement officials, including commanders, must exercise greater restraint, use de-escalation tactics, and remain neutral.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on measures taken by your Excellency's Government to search for, and elucidate the fate and whereabouts of, persons reportedly forcibly disappeared and release them, or in the event of death, locate, respect and return their mortal remains. Moreover, please provide information on the measures taken to investigate promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially and effectively the reported enforced disappearances, identify, prosecute and sanction those responsible. If no investigations have yet been undertaken, please provide information as to the reasons thereof.
3. Please provide information on the measures taken by your Excellency's Government to carry out an inquiry or to investigate the persons reported missing or subjected to enforced disappearance and to establish their fate and whereabouts, and in the event of death, to locate, respect, exhume and return their remains to their families. If no inquiry has taken place, please explain why.
4. Please provide information on the factual and legal basis for the arrest and detention of opposition members and supporters. Please include information on how many detained protesters have since been released, and with regards to those still detained, the place of detention and their state of health, as well as whether they have been charged with a recognizable criminal offence, have been granted access to a lawyer of their choice, and could be visited by their family, and have been promptly brought before a judge to determine the validity of their detention.
5. Please provide information on the measures taken by your Excellency's Government to guarantee their right not to be deprived arbitrarily of their liberty and to fair proceedings before an independent and impartial tribunal, in accordance with articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPR.
6. Please provide information on the measures the State has taken to end restrictions on media freedom and ensure the safety of journalists and media workers and their ability to report freely, including in the electoral context
7. Please indicate whether the Government will refrain from imposing social media or internet shutdowns as well as from blocking platforms or websites, in line with their international law obligations and commitments.
8. Please provide information on the preventive strategies that will be established to facilitate the exercise of the rights to freedom of assembly and of association, in consultation with diverse civil society actors, including those working on issues of sexual orientation and gender

identity and opposition parties, addressing past and current human rights concerns.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government that should sources submit the allegations concerning individual cases of enforced disappearances for the consideration of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances under its humanitarian procedure, the case will be examined by the Working Group according to its methods of work, in which case your Excellency's Government will be informed by separate correspondence.

We would like to inform you that the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may also transmit a case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion on whether a deprivation of liberty was arbitrary or not. The present communication in no way prejudices any opinion the Working Group may render. The Government is required to respond separately to this letter and the regular procedure.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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Gabriella Citroni

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Irene Khan

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Graeme Reid

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Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to remind your Excellency's government of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Uganda on 21 June 1995, the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media". This right applies online as well as offline, protects the freedom of the press as one of its core elements and includes not only the exchange of information that is favourable, but also that which may criticize, shock, or offend.

In its [general comment No. 34](#), the Human Rights Committee stated that States parties to the ICCPR are required to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including "political discourse, commentary on one's own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse" (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11). The Committee states that article 19 also covers the right of a free press and other media able to comment on public issues without censorship or restraint and to inform public opinion and a corresponding right of the public to receive media output.

The Committee further asserts that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (para. 23). Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stresses that "all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress" (para. 23).

Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant, and restrictions must always be "the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function" ([CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34](#)).

In this context, we would like to underscore that the deprivation of liberty as punishment for the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of assembly and association is arbitrary. As such, article 19, provide protection for, inter alia, political discourse, commentary on one's own and on public affairs, discussion on human rights, journalism, among others (Human Rights

Committee, general comment no. 34, para. 11). While all restrictions must comply with the requirements of necessity and proportionality, the penalisation of a journalist solely for being critical of the government or the political social system espoused by the government can never be considered to be a necessary restriction of freedom of expression (CCPR/C/GC/34 para. 42).

In her recent report on “freedom of expression in turbulent times”, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression once again called on States to “refrain from blocking platforms or websites, as such disruptions are inherently disproportionate” (A/80/341, para. 109).

Articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR provides that the right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others” (ICCPR, art. 21). Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests” (ICCPR, art. 22 (1)).

No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on members of the armed forces and of the police in their exercise of this right” (ICCPR, art. 22 (2)).

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful of assembly and association noted in the report A/68/99, paragraphs 5 and 12, that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are pertinent to the democratic process, both during the election period and between elections. The Special Rapporteur reiterates that these rights are essential components of democracy since they empower women, men and youth to “express their political opinions, engage in literary and artistic pursuits and other cultural, economic and social activities, engage in religious observances or other beliefs, form and join trade unions and cooperatives, and elect leaders to represent their interests and hold them accountable” (Council resolution 15/21, preamble).

In her recent report on the impact of the 2023-2024 “super election” cycle on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (A/HRC/59/44), the Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and association noted that protests raising certain critical issues or opposing authorities’ policies were met with undue restrictions and excessive use of force by law enforcement, thereby preventing selected groups’ right to participation through the silencing of their voices. (...) the use of force, often as the first choice, and the wide, indiscriminate use of crowd control weapons, by authorities in many countries, suggest an intentional crackdown on dissent and political participation. Closing the space for people to raise their concerns and repression of peaceful protests and political rallies resulted in electoral violence in some countries.

In his report on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to the human rights to freedom of expression,

peaceful assembly and association (A/HRC/56/49), the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity explicitly calls on States to remove obstacles for the registration of organizations associated with sexual orientation and gender identity (A/HRC/56/49, par. 78(j)), noting that “the ability to be recognized as independent legal entities under the law is a prerequisite for groups to perform necessary functions, such as raising funds, operating bank accounts, contracting goods and services or renting premises. Registration also provides access to advocacy platforms and helps create visibility and growth for national movements” (A/HRC/56/49 par. 44)

The Independent Expert further observes that States enact a variety of measures to prevent the registration of organizations working on sexual orientation and gender identity: “Many States refuse to register organizations that work on sexual orientation and gender identity-related issues, or establish unnecessary administrative obstacles that effectively prevent groups from registering. Sometimes the work of existing groups is suspended by authorities or subjected to official investigation for no reason other than the fact that it is work on sexual orientation and gender identity-related issues.” He draws attention to the deleterious impact of such policies, noting that “this has the effect of undermining the rights to freedom of assembly and association of those groups and organizations – setting the stage for a variety of penalties designed to unlawfully punish individuals and groups for their political opinions, identities, human rights advocacy and efforts to express divergent viewpoints.” (A/HRC/56/49, par. 44)

The widespread use of force by law enforcement highlights the urgent need for training and institutional reforms, including the implementation of the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests and its incorporation into election security manuals; and recommended to prioritize restraint and negotiations and avoid the use of force.

We would like to remind your Excellency’s Government of its positive obligation as required by article 2 of the ICCPR, to ensure that they are fully discharged not just against violations of Covenant rights by its agents, but also against acts committed by private persons or entities that would impair the enjoyment of Covenant rights in so far as they are amenable to application between private persons or entities (general comment 31, para. 8). We would like to remind your Excellency’s government of its obligations under article 25 of the ICCPR, which protects the right of every citizen to “take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives.” The Human Rights Committee has notably observed that “persons entitled to vote must be free to support or oppose their government” and “should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind.” (Human Rights Committee, general comment no. 25 para. 19).

We would like to recall that the absolute prohibition of enforced disappearances and the corresponding obligation to investigate them has attained the status of *jus cogens*. Enforced disappearance amounts to violations of articles 6, 7, 9 and 16 of the ICCPR, read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3). Moreover, it would entail a violation of article 7, read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3) of the ICCPR with regard to the relatives of the disappeared person. In this respect, we also make reference to general comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the ICCPR, which states, inter alia,

that extreme forms of arbitrary detention that are themselves life-threatening, in particular enforced disappearances, violate the right to personal liberty and personal security and are incompatible with the right to life (para. 57), and that enforced disappearance constitutes a unique and integrated series of acts and omissions representing a grave threat to life, and States parties must take adequate measures to prevent the enforced disappearance of individuals and conduct an effective and speedy inquiry to establish the fate and whereabouts of persons who may have been subject to enforced disappearance. (para. 58).

Notably, in order to constitute an enforced disappearance, a deprivation of liberty must be followed by a refusal to acknowledge such deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared person, which places such a person outside the protection of the law, regardless of the duration of the said deprivation of liberty or concealment. We wish to reiterate the joint statement of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on so-called “short-term” enforced disappearances, which affirms that duration is not a constitutive element of enforced disappearance under international human rights law, therefore regardless of the duration of an enforced disappearance, it produces serious harm and consequences for the disappeared and their families, and also presents practical challenges as regards seeking protection as well as defence of their rights.

Under article 9.1 of the ICCPR “[n]o one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.” Moreover, article 9.2 stipulates that the person must be informed, at the moment of the arrest, about the reasons for such deprivation of liberty; in addition, the information about the charges against the person should be provided without delay. According to article 9.3, anyone deprived of his or her liberty “shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release.” Article 9.4 provides that “[a]nyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings before a court, in order that that court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of his detention and order his release if the detention is not lawful”. Furthermore, article 10 states that, “all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person”.

We draw your Excellency’s Government’s attention to the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, which establishes that no State shall practice, permit or tolerate enforced disappearances. Moreover, the Declaration also proclaims that each State shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent and terminate acts of enforced disappearance in any territory under its jurisdiction. We also make reference to articles 7, 10 to 13 and 19 of the Declaration, which state no circumstances may be invoked to justify enforced disappearances; that persons deprived of liberty shall be held in an officially recognized place of detention; and that their release is conducted in a manner permitting reliable verification; that national laws shall indicate those officials authorized to order deprivation of liberty and stipulate penalties for violations; that any person having knowledge or a legitimate interest who alleges that a person has been subjected to enforced disappearance has the right to complain to a competent and independent State authority and to have that complaint promptly, thoroughly and

impartially investigated by that authority. Whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe that an enforced disappearance has been committed, the State shall promptly refer the matter to that authority for such an investigation, even if there has been no formal complaint. Article 13 also states that steps shall be taken to ensure that all involved in the investigation, including witnesses, are protected against ill-treatment, intimidation or reprisal. In this regard, we recall the 2019 Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons which consolidates good practices in searching effectively for disappeared persons, arising from States' obligation to search and also make reference to the Guidelines on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances in Africa. Lastly, article 19 provides that victims of acts of enforced disappearance and their family shall obtain redress and shall have the right to adequate compensation.

We also make reference to the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances study on Enforced disappearance and economic, social and cultural rights (A/HRC/30/38/Add.5), in particular paragraph 33-37 which highlights the chilling effect of the disappearance of journalists and human rights defender. States are accordingly called on to, “ensur[e] the existence of and respect for cultural diversity and the existence of space where multiple opinions, positions and interpretations of history can find their expression in the public sphere diminishes the level of vulnerability of those questioning in one way or another mainstream ideas and positions, and so prevents against targeting of human rights defender” (para. 49) We further recall the Working Group's study on new technologies and enforced disappearances, in which it raises concern with regards to targeted and mass surveillance to suppress dissent and target human rights defenders (A/HRC/54/22/Add.5, para. 57).

We would also like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (A/RES/53/144), also known as the “United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders”, and in particular articles 1 and 2, which stipulate that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels, and that every State has the primary responsibility and duty to protect, promote and fulfil all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Similarly, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's government to the following provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders: - Article 6 (b), which stipulates that everyone has the right to “freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms,” and (c) “to draw public attention to those matters.” – Article 9 (3a), which provides everyone has the rights to “complain about the policies and actions of individual officials and governmental bodies with regard to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, by petition or other appropriate means, to competent domestic judicial, administrative or legislative authorities or any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, which should render their decision on the complaint without undue delay.” – Article 12, paras. 2 and 3, which stipulates that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of all persons from violence, threats, reprisals, de facto or de jure discrimination, pressure or other arbitrary action in the context of the legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in this Declaration.