



For immediate release – 30 September 2010

PRESS RELEASE

**Uganda: Joint Mission Calls on Uganda to Safeguard
Free Speech ahead of 2011 Elections**

Following a joint mission to Uganda, ARTICLE 19 and four other international freedom of expression organisations are calling on the government of Uganda to respect its international and constitutional obligations to safeguard freedom of expression.

The International Freedom of Expression Partnership four-day mission was undertaken in September 2010 to assess the deteriorating freedom of expression situation in the country, in the wake of the killing of two journalists and in the light of forthcoming elections in 2011. The mission found that media practitioners, journalists, political cartoonists, and activists in Uganda face grave and pervasive systemic and legal challenges to their liberty and safety, and are forced to work in an environment of widespread impunity.

“ARTICLE 19 notes with concern the continued impunity by perpetrators of violence against journalists and other serious violations of free speech in Uganda which are worrying in the context of the impending presidential and parliamentary elections,” said ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa Director, Henry Maina.

“We urge the government to implement the recommendations of the mission, starting by conducting speedy and credible investigations into the murder of journalists Paul Kiggundu and Dickson Ssentongo. Unless the attacks on journalists are stopped and journalists allowed to do their work freely – including in the north of the country - the forthcoming elections will not be free and fair.”

The government clamped down on media during the 2009 Kampala riots, during which 21 people died and many were injured, by closing four radio stations and banning open air public radio debates. One radio station remains closed, while the other three have re-opened, but under stringent editorial conditions. In addition, the government’s reaction to the terrorist attacks in July 2010 has further exacerbated the freedom of expression situation.

The mission is calling on the government to fully implement laws that protect freedom of expression and repeal laws that are blocking freedom of expression. .

The International Joint Partnership Freedom of Expression mission included delegates from ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression, the African Centre for

Media Excellence, Freedom House, Media Foundation for Western Africa and the Media Institute of Southern Africa. They met with high level government officials, journalists, civil society activists, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, international missions in Uganda, the Speaker of the National Assembly and parliamentarians.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.