



Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) • Chapter Four Uganda • Health GAP • Uganda Pride Committee • Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) • East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

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Civil Society, Human Rights Activists Condemn Ugandan Police Attack on Lawful LGBTI Pride Celebration

(Kampala) On August 4, the third night of a week of Ugandan LGBTI Pride celebrations, a vibrant pageant underway at Kampala's Club Venom to crown Mr/Ms/Mx Uganda was brutally and unlawfully raided the Uganda police, starting at approximately 11:30 pm.

Police claimed that they had been told a "gay wedding" was taking place and that the celebration was "unlawful" because police had not been informed (police had been duly informed, and the prior two Pride events were conducted without incident on Tuesday and Wednesday nights).

The police locked the gates of the club, arrested more than 16 people—the majority of whom are Ugandan LGBT rights activists—and detained hundreds more for over 90 minutes, beating people, humiliating people, taking pictures of LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) Ugandans and threatening to publish them, and confiscating cameras. Eyewitnesses reported several people—in particular transwomen and transmen—were sexually assaulted by police. One person jumped from a 6-story window to avoid police abuse. This person is now in critical condition at a private hospital.

By approximately 1:20 AM all arrestees had been released from Kabalagala Police Station—none had been charged with any offense. This shocking example of Ugandan police brutality did not happen in isolation. It comes at a time of escalating violence targeting media, civil society and the political opposition, see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/18/dispatches-ugandas-brazen-police-beatings>

"We strongly condemn these violations of Ugandans' rights to peaceful association and assembly," said Nicholas Opiyo, a human rights lawyer and Executive Director of Chapter Four Uganda. "These brutal actions by police are unacceptable and must face the full force of Ugandan law."

"Any force by Ugandan police targeting a peaceful and lawful assembly is outrageous," said Frank Mugisha, Executive Director of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), who was among those arrested last night. "The LGBTI community stands with all Ugandan civil society movements against police brutality."

"The Ugandan Government must condemn violent illegal actions by police targeting the LGBTI community and all Ugandans," said Asia Russell of Health GAP. "The US and all governments must challenge President Museveni to intervene immediately and hold his police force accountable."

LGBTI Ugandans routinely face violence, discrimination, bigotry, blackmail, and extortion. Yesterday's outrageous and unlawful government raid on a spirited celebration displays the extreme impunity under which Ugandan police are operating. For more information see: https://sexualminoritiesuganda.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/And-Thats-How-I-Survived_Report_Final.pdf

"The State has a duty to protect all citizens' enjoyment of their rights, including the right to peacefully assemble to celebrate Pride Uganda," said Hassan Shire, Executive Director of Defend Defenders. "A swift and transparent investigation should be conducted into last night's unacceptable demonstration of police brutality." Activists call on governments to immediately and publicly condemn this raid and call on government to take swift disciplinary action against those responsible for these gross violations of rights and freedoms. Pride Uganda celebrations will continue as planned—with a celebration Saturday August 6. The LGBTI Ugandan community will not be defeated. "Our pride and resilience remain steadfast despite these horrible and shameful actions by Ugandan police," said Clare Byarugaba of Chapter Four Uganda.

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