

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Requests for information from NGOs: What you need to know and do

A number of NGOs in Uganda have received information requests from people claiming to be from the Uganda Police Force to apparently make a 'database' on NGOs. Most of the information being requested is already in the hands of different government agencies such as the NGO Bureau, the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB), and the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA).

This has brought about discomfort among actors in the sector. It is important to note that under Ugandan law, only the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) is mandated to collect and keep general data on different sectors or entities. Other state agencies that need to carry out such a data collection activity are required to get approval from the Board of the National Bureau of Statistics. However, it is important to note that the statistics law does not remove the powers of the police and other government agencies from collecting information related to their mandate, for example, investigating the commission of crimes.

This brief provides a quick guide to members of civil society on what they need to know, and do, when they receive information requests from government officials.



1. You've rights

You have rights. Stay calm and welcome the officers in to the office. Any visitor to your office is required to seek permission to access your premises. They are required not to act unreasonable, arbitrarily or unlawfully. If they do, document it.



2. Identification

Ask the police officers to introduce themselves using their official work ID. Police officers carry warrant cards. Ask for a letter introducing them to the the organisation or requesting for the information.

The letter of introduction or request for information should identify the person or people before you; indicate who they want to interact with (If it is addressed to the organisation, a senior member of the organisation should engage. If he or she is not available, ask them to return when the person is there); what kind of information they are looking for; what they intend to achieve with the information or use it for; and when they intend to gather the said information.



3. Information v Search

There is a difference between request for information and searches. Officers who request for information are not expected to conduct a search on your premises, but rather, gather general information. A person asking to search your premises should have a search warrant issued by court and they must show it to you. [Click here](#) to read more about how to respond in the event of police searches.



4. Request limits

The persons are not expected to remove documents or properties from your offices unless the purpose for which they are taking the documents, copies of documents or searches is clear. If they ask to search the premises, ask them for a search warrant or order from court.



5. Call your lawyer

In case you do not feel comfortable sharing the information requested, inform the officers demanding for the information that you will need to consult your lawyer before giving them a response. You have a right to consult. They are expected to give you time to make the consultations. In case of consultation through a phone call, the officers are not expected to listen into your consultations.

For more information legal support, contact:

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