



Unwanted Witness

Amplifying voices Changing lives

7th September 2016

Eng. Godfrey Mutabazi
The Executive Director,
Uganda Communications Commission,
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Dear Eng. Mutabazi,

RE: PETITION CALLING ON UGANDA COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION TO SET STANDARDS FOR INTERNET SHUTDOWN IN UGANDA.

Following a resolution by the United Nations Human Rights Council condemning internet shutdown in Uganda, Unwanted Witness Uganda draws your attention to the existing need to formulating guidelines/standards as bench marks for any institution or individuals who would wish to block or interfere with internet usage in Uganda.

These standards, which are meant to deter impunity, online violations and abuses by either state, institutions or individuals, should be in conformity with the national constitution and other international obligations to which Uganda is a signatory, particularly article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Since rights enjoyed online are as equal as those enjoyed offline, Internet blockage without known standards by users exposes them to impunity by those in positions of power.

For the internet to ably facilitate growth and development as indicated by government's vision 2040 and also deter future blockage, standards should be set to make Ugandans aware of when they should expect blockage and plan accordingly.

During 2016 general elections, Ugandans experienced an abrupt Internet and mobile money services shutdown violating citizens' right to freedom of speech, opinion and expression as enshrined in article 29 (1) of the 1995 Uganda constitution.

The same right is emphasized by the renewed 2012 and 2014 UN resolutions that declared unequivocally that human rights apply online just as they do offline.



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It is therefore imperative that government observes Internet rights in accordance with its international human rights obligations, in particular with regard to freedom of expression, freedom of association and privacy among others.

The Unwanted Witness is deeply concerned by the UCC's silence on standards to switch off the Internet, human rights violations and abuses committed against persons for exercising their fundamental freedoms online with impunity by security agencies.

A number of Netizen have been intimidated, harassed, waylaid and kidnapped, arrested and detained and charged with trumped-up charges among others. These and other attacks on online freedoms do affect the enjoyment of all human rights and will have chilling effects on the opportunities being presented by the Internet.

Article 20 (2) of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, obligates the Uganda Communication Commission to respect, uphold and promote rights and freedoms of individuals and groups as enshrined in the bill of rights.

Internet as a modern technology for spreading information and communication has great potential to accelerate human progress and knowledge development amongst societies. Equally when the Internet is blocked, its effects to society include;

- (i) Internet shutdown undermines the open nature of the online platform as a driving force towards development in its various forms including in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- (ii) It interferes with citizens' right to freedom of expression and opinions as well as the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- (iii) Since access to information on the Internet facilitates vast opportunities including digital literacy and bridging digital divide, blocking its usage only breeds an ignorant and dorsal society.
- (iv) Internet shutdown is a stumbling block to the attainment of government's vision 2040, which focuses on ICT as an engine for development. This further interferes with technological innovations in the Uganda.

We therefore recommend that

1. Internet shutdown guidelines are urgently drafted by UCC and shared with stakeholders and publicized to avoid the reoccurrence of abrupt interference and violation of Internet freedoms.
2. Conduct stakeholders consultative meetings for purposes of collecting views and inputs.

Unwanted Witness Uganda is a civil society organization working towards enhancing the promotion, protection and respect of human rights through defending and building the right to privacy, data protection and safety and security online in Uganda for everyone to effectively exercise their constitutional rights and fundamental freedoms.

Enclosed is the copy of the UN resolution.

Signed,



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