

## **Press Statement**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### **Unwanted Witness Denounces Digital Rights Violations During the Kawempe North By-election and Calls for Accountability**

**March 14, 2025 – Kampala, Uganda:** Unwanted Witness strongly condemns the egregious violations of digital rights, press freedom, and access to information witnessed during the Kawempe North by-election on March 13, 2025. The violent assaults, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation of journalists covering the election reflect a dangerous pattern of state-sponsored suppression of fundamental rights in Uganda. These actions undermined the principles of democracy and open society, and they must be met with immediate accountability.

Reports indicate that multiple journalists were subjected to physical assault and arbitrary arrests. Among them, Francis Isaano, a photojournalist with NBS Television, along with Abubaker Lubowa, Dennis Kabugo, and Raymond Tamale of the Nation Media Group, suffered severe beatings at the hands of masked security personnel, leaving them hospitalized due to their injuries.

Such actions represent an alarming trend of increasing threats to the safety of media personnel and the suppression of freedom of expression. The right of journalists to cover events without fear of violence or intimidation is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance and digital rights. The disruption of their ability to report on the election not only hinders press freedom but also deprives the public of crucial information about the electoral process.

In addition to the assaults and arrests, the use of surveillance technologies, including drones hovering over polling stations, has raised concerns about privacy violations and the potential for intimidation of voters and journalists. The deployment of such technology must be subject to scrutiny, as it poses a significant threat to the privacy of citizens and journalists, especially in an election context. Unwanted Witness calls for the protection of individuals' rights to privacy, ensuring that no one is subjected to unwarranted surveillance or intimidation which contributes to a climate of fear and

We are also deeply concerned about the intimidation of media outlets, which has led to several respected organizations, such as NBS TV, NTV, Spark TV, Daily Monitor, and Radio Simba, withdrawing their journalists from election coverage for fear of their safety. This withdrawal highlights the hostile environment in which media personnel are forced to operate, further diminishing the public's access to critical information during the electoral process.

The ongoing suppression of free speech and the targeting of the media is part of a broader, systemic issue of restricting digital rights in Uganda. Previous incidents, including social media shutdowns and attempts to control online discourse during elections, reveal a disturbing pattern of silencing dissent and curbing freedom of expression. These actions not only harm the media but also threaten the very fabric of democracy.

Unwanted Witness calls for immediate action to hold accountable those responsible for these violations, particularly the security personnel who have attacked and detained journalists. The lack of accountability for such actions has created an environment of impunity, which further exacerbates the violations of fundamental rights. We urge the authorities to ensure the safety of all journalists, hold perpetrators accountable, and protect the public's right to information.

We stand firm in our commitment to defending digital rights, promoting press freedom, and ensuring that individuals are protected from unwarranted surveillance and intimidation. The violations seen during the Kawempe North by-election are unacceptable and must be addressed in a manner that upholds the principles of justice, accountability, and human dignity.

The attack on press freedom is an attack on democracy itself. Unwanted Witness remains committed to defending digital rights and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. We urge the Ugandan government to take immediate steps to ensure that journalists can operate without fear, and that all citizens can freely exercise their right to information.

**END**



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