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Universal Periodic Review – THIRD CYCLE**  
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January – February 2022

## **Republic of Uganda**

Joint Submission of **Jubilee Campaign** and **Set My People Free**

July 2021

Jubilee Campaign promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities; advocates for the release of prisoners of conscience imprisoned on account of their faith; advocates for and assists refugees fleeing religious based persecution; and protects and promotes the dignity and safety of children from bodily harm and sexual exploitation. Jubilee Campaign holds special consultative status with ECOSOC at the United Nations.

### **A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence**

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**United Nations Human Rights Council  
Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Uganda**

**I. Background**

1. **Jubilee Campaign**, in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in the Republic of Uganda as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of the UNHRC member-state Uganda.
2. **Set My People Free** is a network of individuals, churches and organizations working for the freedom of converts from Islam to live and practice their new faith, and to experience equality and justice in their home countries.

**II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and bodies**

3. Uganda has ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
4. Uganda has not ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty; the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Interstate communication procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

**Recommendation(s)**

We urge the Republic of Uganda to:

5. Ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty; the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Interstate communication procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

### III. Violations of international human rights obligations, considering applicable international humanitarian law

#### A. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

6. Uganda's Constitution states that the nation shall have no official religion and in Article 29 elaborates that citizens have the freedoms of conscience, religion, assembly, and association.<sup>1</sup>
7. Uganda's Penal Code Act contains an entire chapter (Chapter XIII) on Offences relating to religion, including Article 122 criminalizing blasphemy. Article 122 stipulates that "any person who, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any other person, writes any word, or any person who, with the like intention, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of any other person or makes any gesture or places any object in the sight of any other person, commits a misdemeanour and is liable to imprisonment for one year."<sup>2</sup> Blasphemy laws are inconsistent with human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief outlined in Article 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>3</sup> and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, as outlined by lawyer and doctoral researcher Nimrod Muhumuza, Article 122 is so imprecise that "a prospective suspect's [individual accused of blasphemy] fate depends on the feelings and the sensibilities of another individual"<sup>5</sup> thus violating the principle of legality which requires that offenses must be clearly defined and "criminal law must not be extensively interpreted to an accused's detriment".<sup>6</sup>
8. As per Article 29 of the Ugandan Constitution and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) involves the freedom to change one's religion freely. Moreover, Article 6 of the ICCPR prohibits arbitrary deprivation of life. In Uganda, however, the religious converts face severe – and often deadly – reprisal attacks by non-state actors, often extremists, which endanger both their right to freedom of religion and life:
9. Between 18 May and 29 May 2020, Ugandan authorities arbitrarily arrested six Muslim civilians; five of the detained individuals had leadership roles in their mosques, including being Imams or Muezzins. The first arrest was of Umaru

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<sup>1</sup> *Uganda: Constitution of the Republic Uganda* [Uganda], 222 September 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Uganda, *Penal Code Act (Chapter 120)*, 15 June 1950 [updated as at 30 September 2020].

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December 1966.

<sup>5</sup> Nimrod Muhumuza, "Uganda's blasphemy law is unconstitutional", *AfricLaw*, 19 June 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Grădinaru, *The Principle of Legality*, Research Association for Interdisciplinary Studies Conference Proceedings – The 11<sup>th</sup> International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences, 20 November 2018.

Nsubuga of Namaseenene village, who was shot in the leg while attempting to flee his home and who has not been heard from by his mother since his arrest. Police then arrested 53-year-old Lamulah Nakyeyune and her son in Butego village, 61-year-old Imam Twaha Kayondo of Kijjabwemi mosque, and two men Noordin Ssali and Bashir; police confiscated personal items, documents, and Kayondos' motorcycle. Prior to the 2020 arrests, Nsubuga and Nakyeyune were arrested in 2017 for their alleged links to the murder of a former police spokesperson, but they were released over a year later due to lack of evidence.<sup>7</sup>

10. In June 2021, Islamist extremists set the home of Pastor Isima Kimbugwe on fire in Kibuku District. They had earlier threatened him against spreading the gospel to Muslim. At the scene of the fire, Pastor Kimbugwe's deceased body was found alongside a note saying "your enmity to Islam is what you have ripe". Pastor Kimbugwe leaves behind a wife and two teenaged children.<sup>8</sup>
11. In June 2021, 38-year-old Hajat Habiiba Namuwaya received threats from her Muslim family members following her renunciation of Islam; her mother had warned her that the family was planning on killing her. Namuwaya sought safety at a pastor's home, but her father arrived, physically beat her, and forced her to ingest poison. Namuwaya is currently recovering.<sup>9</sup>
12. In June 2021, Imam Uthman Olingha killed Bishop Francis Obo of Mpingire Pentecostal Revival Church because "of Allah's word to kill all infidels who 'mislead' Muslims by sharing the Gospel".<sup>10</sup>
13. In June 2021, a Christian evangelist woman was verbally and physically assaulted by a group of Catholics for sharing the Gospel outside of the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Shrine in Namugongo. The Catholics that attacked the woman called her a "prostitute" and "Satan" in a video that was circulated by NTV Uganda.<sup>11</sup>
14. In May 2021, a Muslim employer by the name of Ahirafu Kasenyi hired multiple hitmen to kill one of his employees, a Christian evangelist by the name of Fred Isiko. Prior conversations secretly recorded by Isiko showed Kasenyi telling Isiko to abandon Christianity and convert to Islam if he wished to remain employed, though Isiko refused. One of the individuals responsible for Isiko's death explained that Kasenyi had hired him and multiple other hitmen to kill Isiko and seven local pastors. In response to the murder of Fred Isiko,

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<sup>7</sup> Davis Buyondo, "Arrest of Six Muslims in Masaka Sparks Protests", *Uganda Radio Network*, 1 June 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Morning Star News, "Islamic Extremists Burn Pastor to Death in Uganda", 6 July 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Morning Star News, "Muslim Father Beats, Poisons Daughter for Turning to Christ", 2 July 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Aaron Sseuryigo, "Man kills pastor over outreach to Muslims in Uganda, arrested", *Uganda Christian News*, 21 June 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Aaron Sseuryigo, "7 Major responses to attack on street evangelist at Namugongo", *Uganda Christian News*, 4 June 2021.

community members gathered together to ambush Kayensi's home and murder him.<sup>12</sup>

15. In May 2021 in Kibuku District, Muslim family members burnt down the home of Christian convert Louis Levi Baula. Prior to the attack, Baula had taken his ill son to visit their sheikh to pray for his recovery, but upon no improvements visited a church instead to meet with a pastor. Baula his wife Sifah Ainekisha noticed that their son's health was improved following the visit with the local pastor and decided to attend Sunday worship services at the church. In response to their newfound faith, Baula's family disowned them and labeled them as infidels before destroying their home.<sup>13</sup>
16. In May 2021, Kanifa Namulondo, the widow of a Christian convert Siriman Kintu – who was beheaded in 2015 for his religious conversion – escaped her home in Bulamogi County after she heard local Muslims outside of her home saying “The husband betrayed our religion. We should do away with the entire family”. Ms. Namulondo gathered her five children and exited the home right before it was set on fire by the community members.<sup>14</sup>
17. In May 2021, Muslim extremists beheaded Christian pastor Thomas Chikooma immediately following his participation in a debate about Christianity and Islam. Chikooma was invited by local Muslims to attend the debate and discuss Christianity, but when he starting discussing the Bible and defending his religion, Muslim extremist audience members began shouting “Allah Akbar”, forcing Pastor Chikooma and his son to leave the event. Later the same day, a confrontation between Chikooma and two extremists ended in the pastor slapped; Chikooma's son fled the scene and returned to see his father beheaded with his tongue removed.<sup>15</sup>
18. In April 2021, Pastor Yolomim Oduchu was poisoned after he refused to sell his five-acre land to local Muslims who had wanted to build a school and mosque on the property; Pastor Oduchu informed them that he had planned to use his land to build a church. After eating a meal at a Muslim-owned local hotel near his purchased land, Pastor Oduchu returned home feeling ill before passing away in the hospital of poisoning. Following his burial, the pastor's brother returned to the grave to see it desecrated with blood and papers with Arabic writing on them; police dogs traced the blood back to the home of Muslim Aliasa Opedru, one of the individuals who had attempted to purchase the land from Pastor Oduchu. Opedru admitted he sprinkled the blood on the

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<sup>12</sup> Anton Carillo, “Muslim Employer Sends Hitmen to Kill Christian Employee Who Refused to Convert to Islam, Report Says”, *Christian Daily*, 10 June 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Morning Star News, “Employer Allegedly Sends Hit Men to Kill Christian: In another village, Muslim relatives destroy home of new believer”, 8 June 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Morning Star News, “Muslims Burn Down Christian Widow's Reconstructed House”, 16 May 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Morning Star News, “Pastor Slain after Leading Muslims to Christ at Religious Debate”, 12 May 2021.

pastor's grave because he "disrespected him", and he was arrested on suspicion of the killing.<sup>16</sup>

19. In April 2021, Ugandan Christian Hassan Muwanguzi sustained injuries after being deliberately struck by a Muslim on a motorcycle, allegedly in response to Muwanguzi's work assisting persecuted Christian converts. Prior to the incident, Muwanguzi had been receiving messages from Muslims saying "we have been warning you about this several times. But you have refused to heed our directive, so be ready with whatever action we are going to take."<sup>17</sup>
20. In February 2021, imam Caled Bwambale Hussein ordered a group of Muslims to rape three female relatives – ages 19, 17, and 16 years – of Christian Pastor Nelson Walina after he found out that his wife, Mariam Mbambu, had converted to Christianity after attending the pastor's church. Weeks later, imam Bwambale paid 13 teenage Muslims to attack the church, though one of the boys, Ali Masereka, informed the church of the imam's plan and asked for forgiveness. Pastor Walina has received messages from unidentified individuals warning him against evangelism lest he face "severe punishment".<sup>18</sup>
21. In February 2021, 25-year-old Christian convert and mother of three young children, Janati Kyoleka, was attacked by her Muslim husband who beat her with sticks and threw acid on her after finding out she had embraced Christianity.<sup>19</sup>
22. In January 2021, the family of Pastor Moses Nabwana was attacked for a second time in their home just a month after being attacked by local Muslim radicals in December 2020. The mob strangled the pastor's wife, Lovisa Naura, sliced the knee open of the couple's 10-year-old daughter, and inflicted an eye injury on the other 12-year-old daughter.<sup>20</sup>
23. In January 2021, pregnant Christian woman Mansitula Buliro was attacked by her Muslim husband and suffered a miscarriage after she revealed to him she experienced a vision of Christ and had visited a Christian neighbor to pray.<sup>21</sup>
24. In December 2020, a group of Muslim extremists raped a 50-year-old Christian female pastor – name redacted for privacy and security reasons – after months of receiving messages from Muslim neighbors that "we as Muslims have no relations with infidels".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Morning Star News, "[Muslims Allegedly Poison Pastor over Plans for Church Building](#)", 2 May 2021.

<sup>17</sup> *Supra note 8.*

<sup>18</sup> Morning Star News, "[Pastor's Relatives Raped after Imam's Wife Turns to Christ](#)", 11 March 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Morning Star News, "[Christian Mother in Uganda Hit with Acid for Her Faith, Sources Say](#)", 26 February 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Morning Star News, "[Family of Assaulted Pastor Attacked Again by Area Muslims](#)", 28 January 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Morning Star News, "[Woman Loses Family after Responding to Visions, She Says](#)", 22 January 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Morning Star News, "[Muslim Extremists Rape Pastor in Eastern Uganda, Sources Say](#)", 30 December 2020.

25. In December 2020, 38-year-old Christian convert and mother of three, Zubeda Nabirye, was attacked and forced to drink pesticide by her Muslim husband after he found her secret stash of Bibles.<sup>23</sup>
26. In November 2020, Muslim relatives attacked Christian convert and former Islamic teacher Emmanuel Hamuzah after he refused to renounce Christianity and return to his former faith. The assailants beat Hamuzah with sticks and killed his 6-year-old son by stepping on his neck.<sup>24</sup>
27. In November 2020, four Muslim extremists stopped Pastor Wilson Niwamanya and his 12-year-old son Simon Peter Bizimaana while they were returning home from distributing Christian literature. During the incident, the attackers shouted “this man must die for disrespecting our religion”; pastor Niwamanya sustained severe head injuries but survived the attack, though his son perished from stab wounds.<sup>25</sup>
28. In October 2020, Muslim extremists killed David Omara after he praised Christianity and disputed Islam in a radio broadcast.<sup>26</sup>
29. In September 2020, a 13-year-old Christian son of Christian convert and former imam Sulaiman Pulisi was killed; it is believed that he was killed in a ritual sacrifice two years after local Muslim radical woman Sania Muhammad kidnapped and sold the boy and his young sister to a witchdoctor in 2018. The boy’s 15-year-old sister has since been rescued and reported that she was used as a “sex object” during her time in captivity of a Muslim shaman.<sup>27</sup>
30. In June 2020, 25-year-old Pastor Peter Kyakulaga and 22-year-old church member Tuule Mumbya were beaten and drowned by local radical Muslims in an act of revenge for their activities peacefully evangelizing Muslims along the river coast during fishing trips.<sup>28</sup>
31. In June 2020, Muslim radicals attacked the wife of Christian convert and former imam Marijan Olupot in response to his newfound faith.<sup>29</sup>
32. In May 2020, a Muslim father set fire to his 24-year-old daughter Rehema Kyomuhendo after he overheard her talking about Jesus in a phone conversation with a Roman Catholic. Ms. Kyomuhendo survived the attack.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Morning Star News, [“Muslim in Uganda Forces Christian Wife to Drink Pesticide”](#), 17 December 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Morning Star News, [“Pastor, Two Christian Boys Killed in Islamist Attacks in Uganda”](#), 26 November 2020.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Morning Star News, [“Muslims Ambush, Kill Pastor after Radio Broadcast in Uganda”](#), 6 November 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Morning Star News, [“Christian Boy in Uganda Feared Killed in Ritual Sacrifice”](#), 28 September 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Morning Star News, [“Pastor, Church Member Die for Proclaiming Christ in Eastern Uganda”](#), 30 July 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Morning Star News, [“Villagers Burn Home, Beat Wife of Former Muslim Sheikh in Eastern Uganda”](#), 22 June 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Morning Star News, [“Muslim Father in Uganda Burns Daughter for Becoming Christian”](#), 21 May 2020.

33. In April 2020, Muslim radicals physically assaulted Lydia Nabirye, the 23-year-old daughter of a Church of God evangelist.<sup>31</sup>
34. In February 2020, 27-year-old Christian convert Sylvia Shamimu Nabafa was beaten by her father, Haji Juma Suleiman, after he was informed she had converted religions and regularly attended church. Nabafa was six months pregnant at the time of the attack, but she is recovering well and her pregnancy remains healthy.<sup>32</sup>
35. In December 2019, 27-year-old mother Florence Namuyiga was brutally beaten and abandoned by her husband after he overheard their sons singing Christian worship songs. He had threatened to kill her if she didn't leave the home, so she fled with her 2-year-old and 5-year-old sons.<sup>33</sup>
36. In December 2019, a Christian convert couple and their 1-year-old daughter became homeless when enraged Muslim neighbors chased them from their home and threatened them with witchcraft.<sup>34</sup>
37. In November 2019, Christian convert and church leader Ronald Rajab Nayekuliza was poisoned with pesticide at a memorial service for his father. He believes that his brothers were responsible, as they had cursed him and written threats to him about his new faith; weeks prior to the poisoning, the Nayekuliza's brothers slaughtered six of the family's piglets.<sup>35</sup>
38. In October 2019, a group of radical Islamists set fire to Christian Ali Nakabale's home after learning that he had converted to Christianity; the mob was led by Nakabale's Muslim wife. The fire, which was started while Nakabale was not home, killed his young son and daughter, as well as his mother and stepfather.<sup>36</sup>
39. In September 2019, relatives attacked the home of 54-year-old widow Lezia Nakayiza and her Christian family after her 8-year-old son revealed to Muslim family members that he enjoyed participating in the church choir. Lezia's family were Christians from a Muslim background. Nakayiza and her children were able to escape and seek refuge at a local church.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Morning Star News, "Young Christian Woman and Pregnant Convert Seriously Injured in Eastern Uganda", 20 April 2020.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Morning Star News, "Christian Mother in Uganda Loses Marriage for Turning to Christ", 23 December 2019.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Morning Star News, "Christian Poisoned by Muslim Brothers in Eastern Uganda", 22 November 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Morning Star News, "Christian in Uganda Loses Children, Mother and Stepfather to Islamist Attack, Sources Say", 2 October 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Morning Star News, "Widowed Mother of Seven Homeless when Muslim In-Laws Learn She Is Christian", 4 September 2019.



40. In July 2019, Christian widow Sharifa Kasozi Nakamate was told by local authorities that she must either renounce her new faith or leave her home; she relocated.<sup>38</sup>
41. In July 2019, a 20-year-old Christian high school student became homeless and unable to pay his tuition after his Muslim stepfather disowned him and savagely beat him after learning of his new faith.<sup>39</sup>
42. In June 2019, a Christian primary school in eastern Uganda was partially demolished by Muslim community members on account that the schools' nightly worships were "disturbing them". The school is renowned for its student base of Christian converts whose guardians have disowned them for their faith.<sup>40</sup>
43. In June 2019, authorities in Bwera, western Uganda, prohibited "evangelistic events" after a massive Christian prayer event took place in the predominantly Muslim community. A local sheikh explained, "we cannot watch the Christians changing our faithful members to Christianity. If those who have joined Christianity will not return back to Islam, then we are going to treat them as infidels, hence deserving death according to the teaching of Islam."<sup>41</sup>
44. In March 2019, Christian Yusuf Tulo's family home was set on fire by local Muslim residents.<sup>42</sup>
45. In April 2019, Sheikh Hassan Podo, an imam, was harshly beaten when family members found out that he had secretly been absent from mosque prayers and was instead visiting a church for about three weeks.<sup>43</sup>

### **Recommendation(s)**

We urge the Republic of Uganda to:

46. Repeal Article 122 of Uganda's Penal Code Act, as it is inconsistent with the international freedom of religion or belief.
47. Fully prosecute all perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence, regardless of what religious community the attacker and the victim are members of. All acts of religious violence and killings are unacceptable and perpetrators must be held

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<sup>38</sup> Morning Star News, "[Christian Widow Driven from Home in Central Uganda](#)", 18 July 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Morning Star News, "[Unable to Finish School for Becoming Christian, Young Man in Uganda Faces Bleak Future](#)", 2 July 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Morning Star News, "[Part of Christian School in Eastern Uganda Torn Down](#)", 14 June 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Morning Star News, "[Converts, Pastors Threatened with Death; Gospel Meetings Banned in Town in Uganda](#)", 3 June 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Morning Star News, "[Large Family in Eastern Uganda Becomes Big Target for Muslim Extremists](#)", 13 May 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Morning Star News, "[Imam in Eastern Uganda Faces Wrath of Muslims after Putting Faith in Christ](#)", 9 April 2019.

to account for the full justice of the victim, survivor, or victim's/survivor's family.

48. Take decisive action to address hate crimes against those who convert from Islam or question the religion.
49. Work to engage with religious leaders to remove or cease teachings calling for the death penalty of apostates; as such teachings breach fundamental human rights norms of the right to believe.
50. Provide socio-economic support for victims of attacks of religious violence especially for women.
51. Take actions to change the national rhetoric to one of religious plurality and harmony, in order to eradicate intolerance and incitement to violence. Engage with civil society and faith-based institutions to foster a dialogue to resolve inter-religious tensions.

#### **B. Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Violence against Women (VAW), & Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

52. The World Bank and The Republic of Uganda Office of the Prime Minister released a report in September 2020 highlighting the existing issues regarding gender-based violence (GBV) in Uganda. Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains the most common form of GBV in the nation, though it is seldom reported by the victims. Male respondents of the study reported that, while they have a generally negative view of domestic violence, they tend to resort to it in instances when their partner is disobedient. Emotional violence –dehumanizing, humiliating, berating, and threatening – as well as sexual violence and rape are also extremely common in Uganda. The main obstacles to tackling IPV in Uganda include societal expectations of the woman's subservience to their male partners, the misconception that domestic abuse should remain a private matter, and the shame and stigma associated with being raped or punished by an intimate partner.<sup>44</sup>
53. Violence justification and victim-blaming remains a major social problem in Uganda. In January 2020, senior police officer Emilian Kayima published an article in *The Vision* claiming that rape is an act of uncontrollable sexual attraction rather than an act of violence and blaming women's "indecent" behavior and dress as the major cause of sexual violence.<sup>45</sup> Ugandan politician Onesmus Twinamasiko, discussing the issue of physical domestic violence,

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<sup>44</sup> The Republic of Uganda Office of the Prime Minister & The World Bank Group, *Linking, Aligning, and Convening: Gender-Based Violence and Violence against Children Prevention and Response Services in Uganda's Refugee-Hosting District*, September 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Audrey Kawire Wabwire, "Sexual Violence: Uganda Police Should Support Victims, Not Blame Them", *Human Rights Watch*, 18 February 2020.

stated “you must touch her a bit, tackle her, beat her somehow to really streamline her.” Former Ugandan Youth Minister Ronald Kibuule stated “if she [female victim] is dressed poorly and is raped, no one should be arrested.”<sup>46</sup>

54. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown has observably increased rates of GBV and violence against women (VAW) in Uganda. Tensions caused by unemployment, socio-economic stress, starvation, pandemic anxiety, and idleness have increased rates of physical, psychological, and sexual harm in Uganda (i.e., pushing, slapping, punching, forced confinement, neglect, deliberate burns, severe cutting, sexual defilement, marital rape, forced pregnancy). 46% of Ugandan women reported experiencing physical domestic violence “when in fear of an upsurge of COVID-19, lockdown and quarantines”. In the month between 30 March 2020 and 28 April 2020, 3,280 cases of GBV were recorded in Uganda, a major increase compared to non-pandemic times.<sup>47</sup>
55. The World Health Organization identifies the following major existing steps to be taken to improve Uganda’s health system in its response to GBV and VAW: more comprehensive training on assistance/treatment of survivors; increased post-rape care and midwifery education programs; gathering of “medico-legal evidence” for prosecution of relevant GBV and VAW cases.<sup>48</sup>
56. A 2020 study undertaken in 112 rural villages in Uganda showed residents video dramatizations that discouraged VAW. The study found that the permissive and condoning attitudes towards IPV and VAW remained even after watching these videos. Contrastingly, however, female victims reported being more willing to report instances of VAW to authorities and to family; both men and women surveyed following the video campaign reported feeling that community members would be more likely to intervene if they witnessed incidents of VAW. The study found that “the theoretical implication is that it is possible to bring about a meaningful change in outcomes by changing expectations around disclosure to local authorities, without bringing about broad change in core attitudes.” Of course, the end goal should be to change the attitude in rural Uganda towards VAW to one of condemnation; however, in the meantime it is essential to encourage reporting of incidents as a deterrent to future VAW.<sup>49</sup>

## **Recommendation(s)**

We urge the Republic of Uganda to:

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<sup>46</sup> Lindsey Kukunda, “Blaming the women”, *Development and Cooperation*, 7 February 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Madinah Nabukeera, *Prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) during novel Covid-19 lock-down in Uganda*, *The Journal of Adult Protection*, Volume 23 Issue 2, 24 May 2021.

<sup>48</sup> World Health Organization, *Strengthening the health system response to violence against women in Uganda*, 19 October 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Donald P. Green, Anna M. Wilke, & Jasper Cooper, “Countering Violence Against Women by Encouraging Disclosure: A Mass Media Experiment in Rural Uganda”, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 53(14), 2020.

57. Punish all perpetrators of GBV/IPV/VAW;
58. Promote ideas of gender equality, bodily autonomy, and emphasize the illegality and inhumanity of GBV/IPV/VAW;
59. Condemn victim-blaming of and negative social stigma against survivors; similarly, condemn the perception that GBV/IPV/VAW, is commonplace, permissible, or deserved;
60. Improve GBV/IPV/VAW evidence gathering and preservation, reporting and referral mechanisms, record-keeping, victim privacy management, and witness protection; expand criminal investigation capacities;
61. Establish an promote health services and psycho-social services tailored to treat survivors of GBV/IPV/VAW and encourage incident reporting among victims and witnesses;
62. Provide sexual health education, including encouragement of safe sex practices and proper contraceptive use, and regarding the dangers of unsafe sex and sexually transmitted infections.
63. Implement trauma and healing initiatives for survivors.

### **C. Violence against Children (VAC), Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), Child Neglect, & Other Rights Violations**

64. According to a 2019 survey conducted by The Republic of Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, and Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Uganda (TPOUG), 75% of Ugandan children have reported experiencing violence; 50% have experienced physical abuse. In educational institutions in Uganda, corporal punishment – including slapping, punching, and beating with canes is still commonly used despite legislations prohibiting it. Ugandan adults between the ages of 18 and 24 responded to the survey. 70% of men reported experiencing physical violence as boys; 60% of women reported experiencing physical violence as girls; and 90% of all respondents said they had been subjected to it on multiple occasions. Over 57% of girls and 53% of boys have been subjected to sexual violence before the age of 16. Female respondents identified child marriage and exploitative relationships as a main catalyst for sexual violence, as well as stigma against victims and deficient law enforcement. The primary reason many respondents refrained from reporting acts of physical and sexual violence against them as a child was the perception that they were at fault in the incident, that violence was not a real problem, or that no benefit would come out of reporting.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The Republic of Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development & Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Uganda, *Uganda Violence Against Children Survey: Key Findings And Actions*, 2019.

65. Brenda Doreen Nakiryia, Managing Director of Community Concerns Uganda, reported in 2020 that “many girls have entered cross-generational relationships to access basic supplies like pads and soap, which has contributed to early pregnancies”.<sup>51</sup>
66. Uganda, being one of the nations with the most severe COVID-19 lockdown measures, witnessed increased rates of child sexual, emotional, and physical violence, as well as neglect. The Uganda Child Helpline (UCHL), which responds to calls reporting violence against children and usually received an average of 100 daily calls pre-pandemic, reported receiving approximately 1,369 calls a day within 16 days in April 2020. Between 10 and 26 April, UCHL received 21,904 reports. The majority of these reports of violence against children included neglect, physical abuse, and even two cases of homicide, with the main determinants being the guardian’s increased stress-induced aggression.<sup>52</sup>
67. 82% of Uganda’s refugee population is comprised of women and children; 56% of Uganda’s host population are children below the age of 18. In the communities where refugees and civilians interact, children face both physical and structural violence. There is insufficient water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services; health services are generally under-equipped to respond to child violence while maintaining patient privacy; and many children – both boys and girls – are forced to begin working while young in order to support their families.<sup>53</sup>
68. Save the Children conducted a survey of 300 adults in Uganda in 2020, through which they found that one of the most exacerbated forms of exploitation of minors that occurred during the pandemic was child labor and child labor. Both of these forms of exploitation were generally caused by lack of and desperation for resources and “family gains”. Child marriages in turn caused higher rates of underaged sexual activity, unplanned pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections. Instances of child labor and child marriage were most frequently recorded in Karamoja, Wakiso, Rwenzori, and Northern Uganda. Save the Children compiled 116 incidents of violence against children (VAC) in one month.<sup>54</sup>
69. In a 2019 study of child sexual abuse (CSA) in post-conflict regions of Northern Uganda – specifically the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Lira – respondents aged between 6 and 17 years of age reported a few major factors that contribute

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<sup>51</sup> Grace Ren, “Violence Against Children Exacerbated By COVID-19 Lockdowns”, *Health Policy Watch*, 18 June 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Quraish Sserwanja, Joseph Kawuki, & Jean H Kim, “Increased child abuse in Uganda amidst COVID-19 pandemic”, *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, Volume 57(2), 9 December 2020.

<sup>53</sup> World Bank, *Protecting and Supporting Children from Violence in Uganda’s Refugee Hostin Areas*, 10 June 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Save the Children, *Save the Children Protection Assessment on the Impact of COVID-19 in Uganda*, June 2020.

to CSA: insufficient parental care creates a gap in the protection of children from sexual exploitation; perpetrators' use of incentives (i.e., financial assistance) to secure a victim; children being unattended and vulnerable at home and in public places; cultural norms that permit bed-sharing among male and female family members, adults and children; patriarchal attitudes and sexual objectification of women and girls; alcohol abuse and aggression; etc. With regards to CSA intervention measures, children whose perpetrators were arrested or imprisoned were generally satisfied with the outcome of reporting the abuse; children whose perpetrators were not prosecuted reported feeling disappointed, fearful of reprisal, embarrassed by the incident, and more.<sup>55</sup>

70. The 2019 report of the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) found that in Uganda, the most common forms of child's rights violations (ranked from most frequently recorded to least frequently recorded between January and December 2019) include: child neglect and abandonment (916 incidents, 42% of total) ; sexual abuse (228 incidents, 10.5% of total); followed by physical abuse (174 incidents; 8% of total). Other forms of child's rights violations (i.e., emotional abuse, murder, and property rights violations) were less common.<sup>56</sup>

71. In 2020, Al Jazeera visited with the families of disabled children in Uganda to learn of their experiences. In Uganda, disability is mistakenly believed to be caused by sinful actions and possession; many disabled individuals are treated as if they are not human at all. One mother reported that she is "just waiting for this child to die." Another mother of a young disabled girl who has sickle-cell disease, epilepsy, autism, partial deafness, and partial blindness feels stress that she sometimes must leave her vulnerable daughter alone in order for her to go to work and earn money for her family. Midwife Ruth Nakimera has to be careful when informing parents that their newborn is disabled or has a birth defect, because they often react negatively; her grandmother, also a midwife, once had a patient who wanted her newborn baby killed because they had a cleft lip. Some interviewed parents of disabled children reported being told by their neighbors to poison, murder, withhold medicine, or abandon their children. Healthcare worker Jimmy Aner witnessed one woman throwing her lame child into a river. Mother Agnes Nangobi have heard relatives call her developmentally disabled son a snake.<sup>57</sup>

72. In June 2021, the BBC published a video of a 9-year-old Ugandan girl who began working when her school closed down in March 2020 due to the COVID lockdown. In place of her education, she instead helps her mother mine for gold every day, though she says "I want to go back to school when school reopens,

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<sup>55</sup> Anicent Nyangoma, Florence Ebila, & Julius Omona, "Child Sexual Abuse and Situational Context: Children's Experiences in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda", *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, September 2019.

<sup>56</sup> African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), *Child Abuse and Neglect Situation Analysis Report 2019: Uganda Chapter*, 27 January 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Al Jazeera, "It takes a village to kill a child': Uganda's hidden children", 2020.

so that I can learn”. The video shows the young girl engaging in strenuous work, including carrying heavy water containers, walking long distances in extreme heat, all hoping to uncover gold; on the days when the family does not find any, they are unable to eat a meal.<sup>58</sup>

### **Recommendation(s)**

We urge the Republic of Uganda to:

73. Prosecute all perpetrators of child marriage, child labor, intentional child neglect, corporal punishment, and sexual violence against children;
74. Develop an early detection mechanism for VAC and CSA; when necessary, engage in pre-emptive intervention and offer support and social services to children and families in situations of vulnerability (financial hardship, child abandonment, insecurity, pandemic stress) that aggrandize the risk of future VAC/CSA;
75. Establish and promote health services and psycho-social services tailored to treat child survivors of VAC/CSA and encourage incident reporting among victims and witnesses;
76. Circulate child-friendly education material on how to identify VAC/CSA and indicators/risks of VAC/CSA, and how to access reporting mechanisms;
77. Condemn victim-blaming of and negative social stigma against survivors; similarly, condemn the perception that VAC/CSA, is commonplace, permissible, or deserved;
78. Improve VAC/CSA evidence gathering and preservation, reporting and referral mechanisms, record-keeping, victim privacy management, and witness protection; expand criminal investigation capacities;
79. Provide support services and tailored childcare education and training to parents, guardians, and/or family of children with disabilities, handicaps, birth defects, and ailments.

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<sup>58</sup> BBC News, [“Child labour in Uganda: The hidden costs of Covid”](#), 25 June 2021.