



## PRESS RELEASE

*Nairobi 16th February 2016, for immediate release*

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### **Kenyan Civil Society concerned about the diminishing Democratic Space in Uganda ahead of the February 2016 Elections.**

On Monday, 15 February 2016, Uganda's police arrested Dr. Kizza Besigye, the presidential flag bearer for the main opposition party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). Dr. Besigye is one of the eight presidential candidates cleared to contest for the Presidency in the upcoming General Election scheduled for 18 February 2016. Dr. Besigye's arrest came only three days to the election polling day and two days ahead of the official closing of the campaign period for political parties.

The information we have is that Dr. Besigye was arrested on his way to a campaign rally at Makerere University where his supporters had gathered. During his arrest police lobbed tear gas and water cannons at the peaceful supporters to disperse them. This provoked the crowd leading to commotion between the supporters and the security agencies, resulting in the death of one of the supporters, with many others sustaining injuries.

The arrest and detention of Dr. Besigye which also led to a disruption of his political campaign, was a violation of the universal right of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of association guaranteed by Articles, 19, 22 and 23 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Articles 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and Articles 9-11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which Uganda is a party. International law allows people to associate without undue restrictions, including for political purposes.

Monday's events are a clear reflection of the uneven playing field for the political opposition to organise and campaign in Uganda, ahead of the elections. Ugandan authorities continue to use arbitrary arrest, the indiscriminate use of force, and

other tactics to keep the political opposition from organizing in preparation for the elections, with bizarre justifications given by the police for such violations.

“We are concerned at the deterioration of democratic space in Uganda. The increase in violations of fundamental rights and civil liberties in Uganda has become so frequent and serious as to create an uneven playing field between government and opposition as the election date nears,” said Njonjo Mue, Senior Advisor to Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice (KPTJ).

The Uganda government should end its crackdown on the political opposition leaders and their supporters, and create conditions for free and fair elections. Every citizen’s right to choose who to support and to vote for should be safeguarded regardless of their political affiliation.

“In the coming days, we expect the Uganda government will ensure a conducive environment exists for **ALL** Ugandan’s to exercise their democratic right to vote for leaders of their choice,” said Stella Ndirangu, a Programme Manager at ICJ Kenya.

The international community particularly development partners who have provided resources for the conduct of the elections should remind Uganda that the world is watching and that the deteriorating rights climate will not be condoned.

**Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice (KPTJ)** condemn the intimidation of the opposition and their supporters and calls:

On the **Government of Uganda** to:

- Respect the political opposition leaders and provide an even environment for political choice and expression before, during and post the 18 February 2016 General Election;
- Cease all reprisals taken against individuals peacefully exercising their right to Freedom of Assembly, Freedom of Association and Freedom of Expression as guaranteed by international and national laws;
- Take action by investigating and prosecuting security agencies who authorized the use of excessive force on peaceful political supporters.

On the **East African Community (EAC)** to:

- Urge the government of Uganda to create universally acceptable conditions for free and fair elections.
- Publicly condemn the ongoing attack on freedoms of assembly, association and expression and reprisals against opposition figures in Uganda.

- Apply pressure on the government of Uganda to stop harassment of political opposition leaders and their supporters and take concrete steps towards ensuring the forthcoming elections are peaceful, free and fair;