

Reporters Without Borders

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Africa - Uganda

Absurd charges

Newspaper journalist granted conditional release after being attacked in prison

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Reporters Without Borders calls for the withdrawal of all charges against *Daily Monitor* correspondent **Perez Rumanzi**, who was released on bail on 17 May after spending a night in an overcrowded prison in the southwestern town of Ntungamo and being repeatedly beaten by fellow inmates.

A judge had ordered Rumanzi placed in pre-trial custody for two weeks on 16 May after he failed to produce two people to stand surety for him. He is charged with "inciting violence" as a result of an argument with presidential security personnel while covering a service in the town's Kyamate cathedral on 29 April that was attended by First Lady Janet Museveni.

"We take note of Rumanzi's conditional release but we condemn the beatings to which he was subjected in prison," Reporters Without Borders said. "This violence must be investigated. Without defending the words he used with the security forces, we think the criminal proceedings brought against him are completely disproportionate and inappropriate, and we call for all the charges to be dropped. He has already suffered enough."

Rumanzi was accredited to cover the cathedral service and had already taken photos inside the cathedral, but he left and was denied entry when he tried to go back. When he insisted on his right to re-enter the cathedral, the presidential bodyguards arrested him for obstructing their work and posing a threat to the First Lady's security, and handed him over to the police.

After he made aggressive comments about the presidential security, the police held him for two days in a police station without charging him and then let him go. It was when he appeared in court two weeks later, on 16 May, that the charge of inciting violence was brought against him and the judge remanded him in custody for two weeks.

Describing his prison ordeal to Reporters Without Borders, Rumanzi said: "They beat me three times. I think my attackers were acting on orders from someone because the other detainees were not beaten for such a long time."

Rumanzi is facing a possible three-year jail sentence. The case is due to be tried on 19 June.

Photo: Perez Rumanzi
