Reporters Without Borders

Africa - Uganda

Journalists detained
Political battle leads to arrests, other collateral damage for media
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Reporters Without Borders condemns yesterday's arbitrary arrests of two journalists in the course of their work – radio host **Richard Kasule** and TV reporter **Mulindwa Mukwasa** – and the action of the Kampala police the day before in preventing reporters from covering a hearing at the Kampala city hall.

Around 20 journalists were denied entry to the city hall on 25 November during a hearing on mayor Erias Lukwago's dismissal. Other reporters who had already been inside were prevented from returning after they went outside to watch a violent altercation between police officers and one of the mayor's lawyers, who tried to deliver a court order suspending the proceedings.

A journalist who was there said only state media reporters were allowed back into the city hall. Several journalists were manhandled when the police tried to seize the phones of those who had filmed the incident outside.

"Preventing duly accredited journalists from covering public government proceedings is intolerable," Reporters Without Borders said. "The violent behaviour of the police and the police chief's threats are unworthy of a democratic country. We also call for the immediate release of Kasule."

Kampala police Andrew Kaweesi yesterday promised to "deal with" journalists who, he said, were publishing false information and inciting violence.

Kasule, a comedian and host of a programme on *Top FM Radio*, was arrested at the station a few hours later as he was interviewing Suleiman Kindandala, the controversial mayor's deputy.

Shortly before his arrest, an official with the Communication Commission, the media regulator, contacted the radio station to demand that the interview be brought to an immediate end. The station's management refused.

Kasule was taken to Wandegeya police station, where he was formally detained on a charge inciting violence and was then transferred to Kampala police headquarters.

Mukwasa, who works for *Wavah Broadcasting Services* and heads the board of the Human Rights for Journalists Network (HRNJ-U), was detained when he tried to visit Kasule and was taken into custody on a charge of obstructing the police and refusing to obey their orders. A woman reporter for the news agency *Uganda Radio Network* was also arrested, and was only released after a member of the agency's management contacted a senior police officer.

The mayor's dismissal is the outcome of a long dispute between him and Kampala Capital City Authority executive director Jennifer Musisi, who is appointed by the president.

Musisi is blamed for several recent attempts to intimidate the media. Samwel Mpimbaza Hashaka, the president's City of Kampala representative, wrote a letter last week threatening a news organization that interviewed the mayor during a broadcast. And a *Radio Simba* reporter who has covered the political battle in detail was banned from attending a city hall meeting on 25 September.

Uganda is ranked 104th out of 179 countries in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.