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PRESS RELEASE

**Uganda: ARTICLE 19 Condemns Repeated Use of Insult Laws
Against Journalists**

Despite repeating their respect for freedom of expression, President Museveni's government continues to use sedition, defamation and incitement laws to repress voices of dissent and curtail press freedom.

The 11 September abduction and alleged torture of Uganda's Radio One talk show host Kalundi Serumaga is only the latest incident of the state's crackdown on freedom of expression. Serumaga was abducted from outside WBS TV station after participating in a television debate in which he criticised President Museveni. He was held overnight in an undisclosed location before being dropped at Central Police Station. Serumaga was then charged with sedition on the grounds of attacking the person of the president with the intention of bringing hatred, contempt and disaffection.

During August, three executives of the Ugandan newspaper *The Independent* were summoned and interrogated by the police on grounds of sedition after publishing a cartoon of President Museveni. The three interrogated included managing editor Andrew Mwenda.

Mwenda is one of the best known journalists in Uganda and is currently facing a charge of sedition from 2005, and 21 criminal charges on various grounds of incitement and defamation. There are also 15 other journalists in Uganda facing a variety of criminal charges.

"The criminalisation of journalists whose views are in opposition to the government is a blatant suppression of free speech. Criminal charges against 16 journalists must be speedily resolved by competent Courts of law," says Dr Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *"Multiple charges of criminal defamation is a method used to intimidate journalists from writing about certain things, The Ugandan government must respect their international human rights obligations, including those related to freedom of expression."*

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Uganda government to:

- Adhere to the spirit and the letter of the Constitution of Uganda, especially s. (41);

- Fulfil its international human rights obligations under in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Uganda acceded on 21 June 1995,
- Fulfil its regional human rights obligations, in particular under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which Uganda ratified on 10 May 1986;
- Respect international and regional human rights standards on freedom of expression, including the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa which was adopted by the 32nd Ordinary session in Banjul, The Gambia, from 17th to 23rd October 2002.
- Establish independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of physical attacks upon journalists, and initiate prosecutions where appropriate;
- Repeal legislation that restricts the ability to critically appraise the government. Such laws are not necessary in a democratic state, but actually serve to impede democratic participation and decision-making.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.