

11 May 2016

## **Uganda – Human rights defender Solomon Akugizibwe charged and facing trial**

On 6 May 2016, human rights defender Mr **Solomon Akugizibwe** was charged by a court in Fort Portal, Western Uganda, with "disobeying lawful orders" and is facing trial, all in connection with his role in monitoring a recent demonstration organised by members of the political opposition.

[Solomon Akugizibwe](#) is the communications and advocacy officer at the **Association for Human Rights Organizations (AHURIO)** based in Fort Portal. The AHURIO is an umbrella organisation encompassing more than fifteen human rights organisations in the Ruwenzori Region in Western Uganda. Working in this rural region, AHURIO strives to strengthen member organisations through capacity building, research, advocacy and increasing access to legal support.

On 5 May 2016, the human rights defender was observing the Forum for Democratic Change demonstration in Fort Portal, as part of his advocacy work with AHURIO. During the demonstration, he was arrested along with several other observers and taken into custody by police. While the others were released, Solomon Akugizibwe was kept in custody overnight, and was not informed of the charges being brought against him. On 6 May 2016, he was taken to court and charged with "disobeying lawful orders". He was released on bail, yet the charges against him still stand. His trial is scheduled for 1 June 2016.

The charges against Solomon Akugizibwe are related to a ban, imposed by the Ugandan Cabinet on 5 May 2016, that prohibits all live media coverage of demonstrations led by opposition leader Kizza Besigye and his political party, Forum for Democratic Change. The announcement of the results of the Ugandan presidential election, where President Museveni was elected to a fifth term, has set off a wave of protests staged by the opposition, some of which have been violently disrupted. The opposition movement disputes the recent election results, claiming that the election process was not conducted fairly. Some journalists and human rights defenders, like Solomon Akugizibwe, have been eager to document and highlight the violent incidents characterised by the involvement of police in disrupting these demonstrations. The ban on live media coverage by the government serves to limit publicity of the protests organized by the opposition movement.

Front Line Defenders expresses grave concern over the charge against Solomon Akugizibwe, which it believes to be in connection with his legitimate work in the defence of human rights. Further concern is expressed with regard to the increasingly limited space in which human rights defenders are allowed to conduct their work in Uganda.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Uganda to:**

1. Immediately drop all charges against Solomon Akugizibwe as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Uganda are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.