

24 May 2016

Uganda – Break-in and theft at offices of the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum

On 22 May 2016 between 3 am and 4:30 am, four unidentified assailants broke into the secure compound and offices of the **Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF)** in Namirembe, Kampala, Uganda. The intruders beat the security guard on duty to death and dismantled all but one CCTV security camera and the alarm siren before breaking into the office building.

[HRAPF](#) is a Uganda-based NGO whose mission is to promote respect and observance of human rights of marginalised groups through advocacy, research and documentation, legal and human rights awareness and capacity building. HRAPF works to increase access to legal support for the most marginalised groups in Uganda, including the LGBT population.

After scaling the wall surrounding the HRAPF office compound, the intruders beat the security guard on duty to death, dismantled all but one security camera, dismantled the security alarm siren, although not the alarm itself, and cut open the iron bars protecting the locked office windows. They broke several windows and entered the building near the staff computer area. The remaining CCTV camera filmed the intruders walking directly to the unmarked office of the Deputy Director, ransacking the office, and then moving to the office of the Executive Director. After a brief period, the intruders re-emerged from the office of the Executive Director and, taking a TV screen, left the building. By this time, the security company in charge of the alarm had arrived after receiving notification of an intrusion. The intruders fled upon their arrival.

At approximately 6 am, the Executive Director of HRAPF arrived and was able to analyse the situation. He reported that the items removed from the office were a paper copy of HRAPF's registration documents, a set of confidential documents, the TV screen, and keys to the annex building, which were later dropped by the intruders on the premises. Although they were unsecured, no computers, laptops or phones were targeted. At 8 am, two hours after they were notified, the police arrived, but have since failed to follow-up with an investigation.

This attack on the office follows a series of attacks against individual staff members of HRAPF over the past three weeks. Three weeks ago, the home of the Deputy Director was broken into in the early morning. When the household was woken up by the sounds of the intrusion, the unidentified persons fled, taking a laptop and several phones with confidential HRAPF information. Two weeks ago, the home of the Head of Advocacy was broken into and electronics were stolen, including a back-up hard drive belonging to HRAPF. In that same week, two members of staff were assaulted and robbed in front of their homes. In addition, in this same time frame, the Executive Director's work phone was stolen.

This break-in is part of a larger pattern of break-ins into NGO offices in Uganda where intruders enter offices despite security measures in place, and ransack the offices while stealing confidential documents or information pertinent to the organisation.

It is reported that since 2013 there have been approximately thirty-five NGO offices broken into in Uganda. This includes an attempted break-in on 10 April 2016 to the offices of the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U) where the building security guard was sedated as the assailants attempted to gain access to the office. These numerous attacks on NGOs in Uganda, and more specifically human rights focused NGOs appear to be motivated by the nature of their work. NGOs in Uganda are facing an increasingly challenging atmosphere of persecution, especially with the introduction of the NGO Bill of November 2015 that created a National Bureau for NGOs which may grant permissions to refuse and revoke NGO registration permits.

Front Line Defenders expresses grave concern for the break-in, theft and murder at the offices of the HRAPF. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern as this follows a pattern of staff and volunteers of HRAPF being individually targeted in the last month, as well as the trend of break-ins at similar NGOs in Uganda since 2013.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Uganda to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of HRAPF staff and volunteers;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the break-in at the HRAPF office, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. 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.