



Kingdom of the Netherlands



**JOINT STATEMENT ON THE
COMMEMORATION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY/
UDHR@75 & HIGHLIGHT OF THE
CEDAW**



Kingdom of the Netherlands



UHRC HEADQUARTERS

6th December 2023

1. Background

It is the time of the year when we come together once again as partners in the protection and promotion of human rights to make this very important annual reflection on one of the most critical and foundational documents in human rights: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Over the years, the Commission has been commemorating the International Human Rights Day (IHRD), but this year's commemoration holds special significance, as it marks 75 years since the UN General Assembly adopted the UDHR on 10th December 1948, in the aftermath of World War II, with commitment to the equality of all human beings, irrespective of colour, race or gender. It has served, and continues to serve, as a global roadmap for rights and freedoms. It forms the bedrock of all subsequent human rights documents, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which safeguards individual liberties, and the International Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, which protects co-enjoyed rights. The UDHR's enduring influence extends to conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA), - which establishes the Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights -



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the Convention Against Torture (CAT), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), and the East African Treaty. These instruments all owe their fortitude to this UDHR, as they mainly buttress its individual articles. Therefore, marking 75 years of this declaration is so profound to the reflection and mechanisms on the human rights journey thus far, guided by the international theme: *Equality, Freedom and Justice for All*.

The Ugandan context

As we embark on tracing Uganda's Human Rights Journey 75 years later, we shall be guided by the local theme: ***UDHR@75, Evaluating Uganda's Progress in the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights***. This will guide our main commemoration event, the High-level National Public Dialogue to be held at Sheraton Hotel - Kampala on Monday December 11th 2023, from 8:30am to 1:00pm.

As a UN member state, Uganda has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to the principles enshrined in the UDHR. The 1995 Constitution can be described as a human rights-centered document, in which the UDHR constitutes its current Chapter Four; also known as the Bill of Rights. The same 1995 Constitution creates a National Human Rights Institution, the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), which is charged with the protection and promotion of all human rights and freedoms under Chapter 4 and any other provisions under the laws of Uganda. Uganda has gone ahead to ratify a number of key international conventions and treaties, and as part of the reflection on the 75-year journey, we present a list of some of these crucial instruments :-



1. ICCPR Adopted on	21 st June 1995
2. ICESCR Adopted on	21 Jan 1987
3. ACHPR/Banjul Charter	21/Oct/1986
4. CRC	17/Aug/1990
5. ACRWC/African Children's Charter	17 Feb 1994
6. CAT	3 Nov 1986
7. CEDAW	21 st Nov, 1980
8. Maputo Protocol on ending FGM	17 Feb 1994

The commitments and ratification of the aforementioned international human rights conventions and treaties, along with others, cements Uganda's strong commitment to the safeguarding and upholding of human rights and the UDHR as a living document, 75 years later.

The UHRC continues to stand as a beacon of human rights protection and promotion, with the UDHR as a guiding post to its work since its inception in 1997. The UDHR is evidently traceable in all our Annual Reports to Parliament on the State of Human Rights in the Country and other special reports addressing specific human rights themes or concerns. Notably, the Commission has existed for only 26 of the 75 years of the UDHR, yet has enthusiastically embraced the daunting task of monitoring the state's compliance with its commitments under the UDHR and other international treaties and conventions.

Extending its role of educating and empowering citizens with human rights knowledge, the Commission has also, for decades now, been spearheading commemoration activities during which it carries out joint advocacy and publicity campaigns to emphasize the profound importance of the UDHR to the lives of ordinary persons in Uganda. During the Commemoration of the 70 years of the UDHR, the Commission, together with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for



Human Rights (OHCHR), conducted an Essay and Art Competition to cultivate a culture of human rights observance among youth aged 16-24 years. Additionally, the Commission and partners established a human rights museum, featuring an artistic presentation of the rights and freedoms under the UDHR. Last year, the Commission conducted a psychosocial camp in the peri-urban Nakawuka area in Kajansi town Council – Wakiso district, targeting mainly vulnerable women and widows deprived of their land due to succession issues or wanton land grabbing.

2. The current situation

As mentioned above, the UHRC and its partners annually take this International Human Rights Day as an opportunity to reflect on the gains and the challenges faced, as well as draw plans for better management of the prevailing challenges in the following year. We therefore wish to briefly highlights the key developments between December 2022 and the present.

- i. The Commission has commemorated other significant international human rights days, including World Press Freedom Day (May 3rd), the UN Day in Support of Victims of Torture (June 26th) and the International Day on Access to Information (September 23rd). We also held the International Peace Day in September last year, bringing together key cultural, political, religious and opinion leaders to discuss the future of Uganda’s co-existence mechanisms and address the growing concerns of hate-speech and individualism that threaten wholesome nation-building.
- ii. In April this year, the Commission demonstrated its commitment to upholding the rights of women by defending the freedoms of



assembly and association for female Members of Parliament during the commemoration of International Women’s Day, when these rights faced potential infringement.

- iii. The Commission has also released its report in an investigation it started on November 28th, 2022 regarding alleged missing persons. This report, issued on October 10th, 2023, complements two previous findings on this matter highlighted in our 23rd and 24th Annual Reports on the State of Human Rights in the country. On this note, we wish to appreciate the efforts of the government for constantly informing the general public about the alleged missing person and members of the opposition for seeking answers where they felt not satisfied.
- iv. We remain focused on handling and reducing the backlog of human rights complaints before our Human Rights Tribunal, mainly accumulated during the two years when the UHRC lacked a chairperson and due to logistical challenges. Over 200 cases have been heard and disposed of since the tribunals sessions resumed in May 2022.
- v. We have continued to engage various stakeholders about human rights through various training and civic education, notably, we conducted a nationwide training for all District Planners; we held a training for key leaders of companies involved in labour externalization and a training for Guild Presidents of universities around Kampala focusing on the Human Rights Based Approach. Furthermore, we have trained members of the UPDF and the Uganda Police Force in defense and policing mechanisms that observe human rights, and conducted community Barazas for ordinary people across the country.



vi. Recognizing the budding Oil and Gas sector's significance as a key resource focus, the Commission has closely monitored developments therein, particularly the human rights issues regarding compensation and anticipated environmental issues related to the various ongoing construction projects. We dedicated an entire chapter in our 25th Annual Report of 2022 addressing this issue.

3. Commemoration activities

As part of the commemorations marking 75 years of the UDHR, the commission, together with key partners, have organized a series of activities aimed at mobilizing everyone to fully participate in these commemorations and to spread messages about the significance of the UDHR to us all. The activities are divided into three categories: the pre-main event activities, the main event and activities designed to carry the messages beyond December 10th:-

1. This press conference, supported by the UHRC, is one of the pre-activities aimed at mobilizing the general public to take part in this year's commemoration activities and to carry the message beyond the main event.
2. In collaboration with the Germany Agency for International Corporation (GIZ), we have organized three Community Barazas in Mpigi district, primarily targeting fishing communities in Buwama Sub-county. This initiative aims at empowering ordinary citizens to understand the concept of human rights, and providing them with free legal and psychosocial support.
3. We will host a twitter space in the evening of Sunday 10th December from 7:00pm, supported by Agora. Additionally, two radio talk shows will be held on December 10th in Kampala and



one in Gulu, supported by the African Center for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV) and Justice Access Point (JAP). JAP is also supporting us with an online podcast in which we explain the profound importance of the UDHR, highlight our work and discuss the International Human Rights Day activities organized this year.

4. The Commission again with partners will conduct a multi-media campaign where it will produce materials such as banners, flyers, T-shirts and commemorative souvenirs to carry the UDHR@75 beyond the main event
5. All the above activities will be crowned with a High-level National Public Dialogue to be held at Sheraton Hotel under the Theme: ***UDHR@75, Evaluating Uganda's Progress in the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights.*** This is primarily aimed at bringing together key decision and policy makers to discuss Uganda's commitment to human rights protection and promotion, and to provide a platform for rights-holders to share their perspective and assessment of the services received, thus far.

We therefore take this opportunity as a Commission to appreciate our various partners for making this day a success. Our special thanks go to the government of Uganda, ASF, UNFPA, JAP and ACTV for their unwavering support. We are particularly grateful to ASF and UNFPA for their work around the clock to ensure a high-level discussion on the UDHR@75, where we will trace Uganda's human rights journey.

4. Challenges

Despite the progress made, the Commission continues to face significant financial constraints. We reiterate our call to the government and development partners to consider equipping us with



the necessary resources and tools to enable us to effectively execute our work

5. Conclusion

As we commemorate these 75 years of the UDHR, we take this opportunity to reflect on the universalness of all human rights and utilize all available reporting and protection mechanisms to ensure we attain a society that respects human rights and fulfills its civic obligations. We wish to invite all of you here present to our main commemoration event at Sheraton Hotel on Monday 11th December 2023 starting 8:00am. Together, let us reaffirm our commitment to the UDHR and its enduring principles of equality, freedom, and justice for all.

Thank you.

Mariam Wangadya
CHAIRPERSON/LEAD PARTNER

Irene Winnie Anying
COUNTRY DIRECTOR (ASF)

