

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca
First UA: 9/25 Index: AFR 59/8972/2025 Uganda of January 30, 2025

UGANDA MILITARY COURT CONVICTS HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER IN UNJUST TRIAL

On January 7, 2025, soldiers blocked human rights lawyer Eron Kiiza from entering the defendant's section of a military court. His client, an opposition politician, was being arraigned. When Kiiza protested by shouting and banging on the courtroom barricade, soldiers assaulted him, forcibly removed him, and arrested him. He was then placed in the dock alongside his clients.

Later that same day, the court convicted Kiiza of "contempt of court" without a fair trial. He was sentenced to nine months in Kitalya Prison.

Ugandan authorities must stop trying civilians in military courts. They must also end the targeting of lawyers for simply doing their jobs. Eron Kiiza should be released immediately.

Write to the President of Uganda urging him to:

- Immediately release Eron Kiiza, as he is detained solely for carrying out his professional duties and peacefully exercising his human rights.
- Ensure a prompt, impartial, and effective investigation into the assault on Eron Kiiza.
- Investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment against Eron Kiiza.
- Bring to justice those suspected of being responsible, ensuring fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

Write to:

President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni
Parliament of Uganda
Parliament Avenue, Kampala, Uganda

Email: info@statehouse.go.ug

X: @kagutamuseveni

Salutation: *Your Excellency*:

And copy:

Mr. Allan Kajik
Deputy Head of Mission & Acting High Commissioner
High Commission for the Republic of Uganda
350 Sparks Street, Suite 601
Ottawa, ON K1R 7S8
Tel: (613) 789-7797 Fax: (613) 789-8909
Email: ottawa@mofa.go.ug

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On the morning of January 7, 2025, during a hearing for his client, soldiers blocked human rights lawyer Eron Kiiza from entering the military court's section for defense lawyers. When Kiiza protested by shouting and banging on the courtroom barricade, soldiers punched him in the face, head, and body while forcibly removing him. They then arrested him and placed him in the dock alongside his client. Within hours, the General Court-Martial convicted him of "contempt of court" without reading the charges, hearing arguments, or allowing him to appoint legal representation. He was sentenced to nine months in Kitalya Prison, where he remains detained. His lawyers have appealed the conviction.

When Kiiza's lawyers visited him in detention on January 20, 2025, they observed that he had lost a significant amount of weight and had bruises on his arms and legs. Kiiza reported that military personnel had tortured him, including subjecting him to severe beatings, before he was taken to prison. These allegations of torture and ill-treatment highlight the harsh conditions he has endured since his arbitrary detention.

Eron Kiiza, a prominent human rights lawyer and head of the grassroots NGO Environment Shield Limited, has long opposed the unconstitutional practice of trying civilians in military courts. In July 2021, Uganda's Supreme Court and Constitutional Court ruled that trying civilians in military courts violates the constitution and should be limited to military personnel. Despite this, Kiiza's detention is part of a broader pattern of Ugandan authorities targeting high-profile critics and perceived opponents of the President and his family. Measures include enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and detention.

Kiiza was representing Dr. Kizza Besigye, an opposition politician and former presidential candidate, who was abducted in Nairobi, Kenya, in early November 2024. Besigye resurfaced on November 20, 2024, when he was arraigned in a military court in Kampala on charges related to security and unlawful possession of firearms. He is currently held in Luzira Maximum Security Prison, awaiting trial set to begin on February 3, 2025. Amnesty International has called for Besigye's immediate release, citing violations of international human rights law and extradition procedures.

Amnesty International has condemned Kiiza's detention and conviction as a sham trial that violates Uganda's constitution. His right to a fair trial was denied, as he was not informed of the charges, allowed to plead, or given the opportunity to defend himself. He was also denied the right to appoint legal representation. According to his lawyers, Kiiza appeared weak and had lost a significant amount of weight during his detention, further highlighting the harsh conditions he has endured.

Amnesty International has emphasized that Kiiza's continuing detention is a travesty of justice and underscores the Ugandan authorities' disregard for human rights and the rule of law. His case is a stark example of the systemic targeting of lawyers and activists who challenge the government's actions.

Please take action as soon as possible until June 30, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.