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RIGHTS IN LIMBO: YOUTH ACTIVISTS CONDEMN JUDICIAL DELAYS IN DELIVERING CRITICAL RULINGS

Eight (8) youth activists who filed court cases against ten police officers in 2024 over violation of their rights to freedom of assembly, freedom from torture, freedom of movement and others have written to various judges to express concerns over the judges' delay to deliver rulings in the youth's cases.

The youth wrote to the following High Court judges: Justice Simon Peter Kinobe, Justice Isaac Teko, and Justice Collins Acellam. The youth want the aforementioned judges to fasttrack delivery of the rulings in their cases.

BACKGROUND TO THE CASES

Between October 2022 and May 2024, the eight environmental and human rights youth activists held peaceful marches to the Parliament of Uganda, European Union (EU) offices in Uganda and the Chinese embassy in Uganda.

The activists sought to deliver petitions against development of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project owing to the project's immense human rights, biodiversity conservation and climate change risks.

On their way to the aforementioned offices, the youth activists were arrested and brutalised by the ten police officers. They were detained at the Central Police Station (CPS) and Jinja Road Police station, both located in Kampala.

The youth separately filed three court cases including Misc. Cause No. 133 of 2024, Misc. Cause No. 123 of 2024 and Misc. Cause No. 0124 of 2024, between May and June 2024. The cases were filed before the High Court.

RIGHTS ABUSES

Through the cases, the youth argued that the police officers that they sued violated their right to freedom from torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment that is guaranteed under Articles 24 and 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

They also asserted that the police officers violated their right to freedom of thought and conscience that is protected under Articles 29 and 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

Further, the youth argued that the police officers violated their right to a fair hearing, and freedom of assembly among others. Some of the youth were detained beyond 48 hours, contrary to Article 23(4)(b) of the Constitution.

The youth called on court to declare that their rights to freedom from torture, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement and others were violated by the police officers. They also asked court to give a permanent injunction restraining the police officers from abusing their rights going forward. They further requested for punitive damages to deter any further abuse.

The Attorney General of Uganda was sued alongside the police officers.

DELAYS

The cases were heard between 2024 and 2025 by justices Kinobe, Teko and Acellam. The aforementioned judges committed to issue rulings on the three cases in June, October and November 2025.

However, despite the importance of the cases which are seeking to protect all Ugandans' rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, freedom from torture and others, the rulings on the cases are yet to be delivered by justices Kinobe, Acellam and Teko.

The youth want this to be remedied.

Bob Barigye, one of the affected activists, notes, "The prolonged wait for the ruling in our cases goes beyond individual suffering; it undermines the public's confidence in access to justice from court. The rulings in our cases must be delivered without fail."

AFIEGO supported the youth to file the court cases.

PRIOR JUDICIAL ENGAGEMENTS

This is not the first time that the youth are writing to judicial officers over their cases. Between July 2024 and January 2026, the youth activists and their lawyers wrote 19 letters to various judicial officers requesting that their cases be heard and concluded. Of these, 15 letters requested that hearing dates be fixed. After the judges heard the cases, they delayed to issue rulings, prompting the youth to write four letters requesting that the rulings in their cases are delivered.

The youth, through their lawyers, also wrote another nine letters requesting for change of judges among others. This brings to 28 the number of letters written to judicial and other government officers over the cases. Despite these repeated efforts, the delays persist.

The youth are now demanding that the judiciary does better by dispensing justice. Justice delayed is justice denied, the youth say. They therefore want the judiciary to issue the rulings for their cases without any further delays.

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