



**April 30, 2026**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Kampala-Uganda**

### **COURT PENALISES GOVERNMENT OVER UNLAWFUL DETENTION OF CLIMATE ACTIVISTS**

As parliament reviewed the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026 that could curtail citizens' various rights and freedoms, a High Court judge issued a ruling that acts as a clarion call to government: respect citizens' rights and freedoms or be penalized.

On April 27, 2026, a High Court judge that is based in Kampala issued a judgement in a case that was filed by three climate youth activists against the Government of Uganda (GoU) and four police officers.

The judge found the youth's right to personal liberty that is protected under Article 23(4)(b) of the Constitution had been violated due to detention of the youth by the police beyond 48 hours without being produced before court.

Further, the judge ordered the GoU to pay general damages of UGX 10 million for unlawfully detaining the youth beyond 48 hours and to pay 50%, after taxation, of the costs of the case.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The above judgement arose from a case that was filed by the youth in June 2024 after they were arrested and detained as they marched to parliament to express concerns related to the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project.

Through the case that was filed with the support of Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO), the youth argued as follows:

- a) That they are climate and human rights** activists.
- b) That on November 24, 2023, they assembled** to march peacefully to Parliament to deliver a petition in relation to the EACOP project.

- c) **That they were intercepted by police officers**, violently arrested, beaten with batons and gun butts, humiliated, stripped, detained incommunicado, and produced in court only on November 28, 2023, four days after their arrest.
- d) **That by those acts, the police officers** infringed on the youth's liberty, dignity, freedom from torture and the freedoms guaranteed under Article 29 of the Constitution.

In their case, the youth asked court to declare:

- **That their detention from November 24, 2023** until their production in court on November 28, 2023 violated their right to personal liberty under Article 23(4)(b) of the Constitution;
- **Further, that the torture, brutality and violence inflicted** on the youth constituted a gross violation and/or imminent threat to their non-derogable constitutional right to freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment guaranteed under Articles 24 and 44 of the Constitution; and
- **That the police officers' obstruction of the youth's peaceful** march to Parliament constituted a direct violation of their constitutional rights to a fair hearing, assemble and demonstrate peacefully among others, as enshrined and protected under Articles 28 and 29 of the Constitution.

The youth also asked court to:

- **Declare the four police officers unfit to continue** holding their respective public offices due to their misconduct, and strip them of their ranks as well as duties.
- **Issue a permanent injunction** restraining the police officers and their agents from any further interference with, violations of, and threats to their constitutional rights.
- **Issue an order that the GoU and police officers pay compensatory** and punitive damages for the violation of the youth's constitutional rights and freedoms.

## **JUDGEMENT**

The judge found that police had detained the youth beyond 48 hours without producing them before court, and made the aforementioned judgement.

While the police officers argued that they had detained the youth beyond the statutory time limit because the police were barred from producing the youth before court over the weekend, the judge argued that the youth could have been issued with police bonds.

Part of the judgement reads, “**Article 23(4)(b) of the Constitution** requires that *a person arrested or detained upon reasonable suspicion of having committed an offence shall, if not earlier released, be brought to court as soon as possible but in any case not later than forty-eight hours from the time of arrest.*”

It further reads, “The respondents’ [police’s] own affidavit and written submissions admit that the Applicants [youth] were arrested on Friday 24 November 2023 and were produced in court on Tuesday 28 November 2023 after referral to the Resident State Attorney and sanction of charges.

The respondents sought to justify the delay on the basis that weekends are excluded ... On the material before me, I am unable to accept administrative convenience, weekend closure or delay in obtaining sanction as sufficient justification against the plain constitutional command. The Constitution speaks in hours, not working days.”

### **DENIED PRAYERS**

However, the judge declined to strip the police officers of their duties and ruled that the evidence before court did not adequately demonstrate that the youth had been tortured during detention.

### **REACTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

“I am happy that the High Court has finally delivered justice in our case. While the UGX 10 million compensation awarded is too low and does not match the pain and humiliation we suffered, I am glad the court stood firm and declared that the State cannot violate citizens' rights with impunity. This ruling gives me hope that justice, though slow, is still possible in Uganda,” **says Ivan Elvis Sanya, one of the youth that was part of the case.**

**Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, the CEO of AFIEGO, says,** “While the judge declined to grant some of the youth prayers, we are happy that the judgement reaffirms Ugandans’ constitutional freedoms to liberty, peaceful assembly and expression among others.

The judge also reaffirmed the fact that per the Human Rights Enforcement Act, public officials can be sued for violating citizens’ rights even when they were acting on orders.

Going forward, we expect police officers to respect citizens’ rights as they can and will be held personally liable for their misdeeds.”

\*\*\*\*\*ENDS\*\*\*\*\*

**For more information, contact:**

Ms. Diana Nabiruma,  
Manager, Programmes and Communications, AFIEGO  
[dnabiruma@afiego.org](mailto:dnabiruma@afiego.org)