



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

**Remarks by Ambassador Attilio Pacifici,  
at the EU Human Rights Defenders Award Ceremony  
2021**

**Residence of the German Ambassador, Kampala  
Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2021, 15:00h**

**Our Human Rights Defenders Award nominees,  
The Acting Chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights  
Commission,**

**The Assistant Inspector General of Police for Legal  
and Human Rights Affairs,**

**Members of Parliament present,**

**Our host his Excellency, the Ambassador of  
Germany,**

**Other Ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic  
corps present,**

**Members of the media,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen here present and those  
following on NTV and online,**

**Good Afternoon.**

Let me start by thanking Mr. Opiyo not just for his inspiring words but even more so for his inspiring actions as well as his dedication and commitment in the defence of human rights, civil liberties and civic space. I am grateful that the “Uganda's rebellious rights lawyer” as Nicholas has been presented in some articles in the press, has accepted to be with us today and I am proud to say that in few occasions the EU Delegation to Uganda has been able to concretely support his work. We will keep doing so as long as the circumstances so require.

It is a pleasure to be here once again for the annual EU Human Rights Defenders Award, which is presented by the European Union Delegation and the Embassies of the EU Member States present in Uganda as well as the Embassy of Norway. This is my fourth year attending this award ceremony which is a strong reminder to all of us of the huge contribution made to this society by human rights defenders in Uganda.

Actually, 2021 marks the tenth year in a row that we present the human rights defenders award in Uganda. The award was first presented in 2012 with the aim of raising awareness of the work being done by human rights defenders and as a way of celebrating and recognising their courage and determination, often in very difficult circumstances. The award is given for significant contributions to human rights provided in the past year, and seeks to give increased visibility to human rights defenders who, despite the important work they do, may not be so well known.

Let me profit of this opportunity to remind ourselves what a human rights defender, or an HRD, is. The European Union Guidelines on HRDs provide a very broad definition, including “individuals, groups and organs of society seeking the promotion and protection of civil and political rights as well as the promotion, protection and realisation of economic, social and cultural rights.” Human rights

defenders also promote and protect the rights of members of minority groups.

The work of human rights defenders is wide-ranging. It includes documenting violations, seeking remedies for victims, the provision of legal, psychological, medical or other support as well as combating cultures of impunity which serve to screen systematic and repeated breaches of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Since 2012, the EU Human Rights Defender award has recognised human rights defenders working in many areas in Uganda including: the freedom of expression, child protection, women's rights, the rights of disabled people and environmental rights.

Last year, the award was given to Mr. Aimé Moniga, for his outstanding contribution to advancing the rights of male survivors of sexual violence in conflict. And I am delighted to see Aimé here with us again today.

The women and men recognised through this award over the past decade embody the spirit of human rights. They show us what is possible when we apply the basic tenets of human rights and the universal values of dignity, fairness, equality and respect in our everyday lives. These leading human rights defenders demonstrate that these values are not just words that sound nice in a speech, but that they have a real life meaning and can have a transformative impact on people's lives.

These universal rights are inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, gender, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. Upholding these rights means for example that each citizen can live in security under the rule of law; that children, women and minority groups can live free from violence and discrimination and fully contribute to society; that our vital natural resources are better protected; etc..

Human rights are also good for business and I would like to laud Uganda for being only the second country on the

continent with a national action plan on business and human rights in the pipeline. We will be very interested in following its implementation.

Fundamentally, in short, respect for human rights underpins sustainable peace and development in any society.

Having lived in this beautiful country for a number of years, it is very clear to me that these values are shared by both Europeans and Ugandans. Nonetheless, as we have heard from Mr. Opiyo just now, human rights challenges exist and those challenges cannot and should not be ignored. There is still a way to go to ensure that everyone in this country has their human rights respected, protected and fulfilled regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender or political affiliation.

Let me use this chance to renew our appeal to everyone in Uganda, including the security services, to make a greater effort to respect human rights and to avoid extremely

unfortunate incidents that have no place in a democratic society.

Unlawful killings, abductions, the beating of journalists are not the marks of a Uganda that we all wish to see in the future and the European Union will not shy away from difficult conversations on these matters. In the spirit of a genuine partnership of equals, we are ready to have a dialogue and to work with everyone in this country to chart a pathway to a situation of greater respect for human rights and a brighter future for all Ugandans.

And I say this fully acknowledging that we in the European Union also have work to do to uphold human rights at home. The valuable work of HRDs is needed as much on our own continent as it is here – to act as watchdogs and whistle-blowers and ensure that all governments live up to their commitments.

I also want to take this opportunity to salute all human rights defenders in Uganda for the work they do, for their

courage and for their dedication to advancing the cause of human rights.

This year, I am happy to report that the response to our call for nominations for the award was stronger than ever. We received well over 100 nominations for the award and the standard of people nominated was again very high. It was a difficult process for our teams to narrow this down to just three people, who are also here with us today.

We will hear more about their work from the Ambassador of Germany in just a minute, but for now, allow me to already congratulate all three shortlisted HRDs, **Rita Aciro-Lakor**, **Rosemary Nambooze** and **Moses Mulumba** for having made it this far – a great achievement indeed.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm the European Union's continued strong commitment to human rights and support to HRD in Uganda as well as our commitment to deepen and to upgrade our dialogue and engagement. This will include, among other actions, efforts to



encourage the Government of Uganda to invite H.E. Eamon Gilmore, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ireland and currently European Union Special Representative for Human Rights, to visit Uganda.

I will now hand over to the Ambassador of Germany who will say a few words about each of the nominees before announcing this year's winner.

Thank you.

[End]