



Statement supporting the Uganda Law Society, expressing grave concern about Sam Mugumya and calling for international action

In a statement issued on 30 September, the Uganda Law Society (ULS) expressed grave concern about the continued disappearance of Sam Mugumya.

Sam Mugumya is a Ugandan political activist, poet and former aide to the imprisoned opposition leader Dr Kizza Besigye. Reports state that, on 26 August 2025, men wearing Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) uniforms seized him while he was having breakfast at an hotel in Mbarara. More than a year later, reports suggest that his family still do not know where he is, who is holding him or whether he is receiving the urgent medical care he needs.

Media reports also raised concern after Lt Herbert Mabonga Matanda, who describes himself as a former Defence Intelligence and Security officer, released a video statement on 30 September 2026. It was accompanied by footage that he claimed showed Mugumya in a severely weakened condition and using a walking frame.

The ULS reported that Mr Mugumya's lawyers had pursued legal remedies, including applications for a writ of habeas corpus, but had not secured an effective resolution.

The ULS also referred to parliamentary efforts to raise the case, including repeated calls by the Leader of the Opposition for the release of political prisoners.

Despite these efforts, no satisfactory public account of Mugumya's whereabouts has been provided.

The ULS has therefore sought international scrutiny, including by appealing to the United Nations, while continuing to pursue remedies through Uganda's courts.

The CLA notes that Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda protects the right to personal liberty, while Article 44 provides:

Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, there shall be no derogation from the enjoyment of the following rights and freedoms

(a) freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

(b) freedom from slavery or servitude;

(c) the right to fair hearing;

(d) the right to an order of habeas corpus.

Uganda is a member of the Commonwealth and has adopted the Commonwealth Charter. The Charter affirms each member's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, other human rights covenants and international instruments, and to good governance through the rule of law.

The CLA notes the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. This Convention describes enforced disappearance as the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person. This places such a person outside the protection of the law.

Article 1 of this Convention provides:

1. No one shall be subjected to enforced disappearance.
2. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for enforced disappearance.

And the Convention requires that each State Party shall take the necessary measures to hold criminally responsible any person who commits, orders, solicits or induces the commission of, attempts to commit, is an accomplice to or participates in an enforced disappearance;

The CLA joins the Uganda Law Society in calling for:

- Mr Mugumya to be brought before the court in accordance with the application for habeas corpus;
- those responsible for his detention to account for their actions and to be prosecuted as required;
- the Government of Uganda to uphold Uganda's Constitution and the rule of law and to meet its international obligations; and
- the authorities to provide clear information about Mr Mugumya's location, health and legal status.

9th October 2026

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