

# Equal Opportunities Commission changing face of albinism

By Reagan Ssemplija

On November 25, Uganda joined the rest of the world to undertake the 16 days of activism for the elimination of violence against women with albinism. This period has been on until today, when the International Human Rights Day will be celebrated.

The 16 days of activism against gender-based violence is a galvanised action to end violence against girls around the world and among those, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is looking at women living with albinism.

The theme for this year's activism — *Leave No One Behind: End Violence against Women and Girls* — reinforces the United Nations campaign's commitment to a world free from violence for all women and girls around the world, while reaching the most under-served and marginalised.

In light of albinism, on June 25, this year, Uganda joined the international community to commemorate the Persons with Albinism Day under the theme, *Shining Our Light to The World*.

During the celebrations, concern was centered on the multiple forms of discrimination that persons with albinism face, which foster their



Babirye Kadoo, Buyende Woman MP (centre), roots for rights of people living with albinism in Busoga region

• marginalisation and social exclusion.

• According to the *Equity Voice* magazine by EOC, the majority of persons with albinism are marginalised and discriminated in the society, especially in

• getting the healthcare that they require and accessing education, employment, legal protection and redress.

• The situation is compounded by deeply entrenched societal prejudices

• against stereotypes of persons with albinism," the magazine reads.

• According to a report from EOC, in June this year, the commission, in collaboration with the Albinism

• Umbrella and other stakeholders, took lead in the day's celebrations held in Mbale district. Among the various

• activities undertaken, the commission registered discriminatory complaints

**AFTER THIS YEAR'S 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM, THE COMMISSION, ACCORDING TO ITS COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE, EXPECTS INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS ON ALBINISM AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONCERNS OF PERSONS WITH THE CONDITION**



RIGHT: The commission calls for equal rights of mothers with albinism for healthcare

• from women with albinism and that those were mothers to children with albinism.

• According to the EOC report, complaints registered were mostly

• gender-based violence related, child neglect, stigmatisation due to lack of knowledge on cause and condition of albinism, denial of the rights to education, belonging, medication

• and life. While the complaints are on record, no follow-up sensitisations, investigations, pre-trial sessions have been conducted due to financial constraints.

**16 days of activism**

• In reference to the existing situation of marginalisation and discrimination among persons with albinism and

women in particular, the EOC according to its communication office, was to (during the 16 days of activism day) undertake specific interventions purposed to address some of the mentioned discriminatory injustices; and, thus, promote equal opportunities for the women/girls and children with albinism.

After this year's 16 days of activism, the commission, according to its communications office, expects increased public awareness on albinism and the socio-economic concerns of persons with the condition.

"We also expect a more active and service-seeking community of persons with albinism. On top of that, we anticipate increased acceptance and reduction of discrimination and marginalisation against persons with albinism," EOC says.

**Target population**

Although the official activity location for this year is Kamuli district, stakeholders from other districts, such as Kampala, Buyende, Mayuge and Luwero districts, will be part of the target population.

According to officials from EOC, a total number of about 100 persons will be reached and these include persons with albinism, stakeholders of persons with albinism, local government officials, religious leaders, cultural leaders and civil society organisations.



EUROPEAN UNION

## Declaration by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the European Union on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2018

On this day, 70 years ago, the Member States of the United Nations came together to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This step brought the world together after the greatest tragedy in human history. We have come a long way since then.

The Universal Declaration has proven to be the cornerstone of international human rights law on which many countries have built a strong and resilient human rights architecture. Today, the number of people living in good human rights conditions is higher than ever in the history of mankind. The Universal Declaration's 70th anniversary is an opportune moment to look closer at how human rights have had an overall impact on our societies.

This is why together with partner countries from different parts of the world, the European Union launched this year the 'Good Human Rights Stories' initiative - showing to the world that promoting and respecting human rights allow our societies to grow stronger and more resilient.

While reflecting on these stories can be a source of hope and optimism, we cannot take human rights for granted. We know the struggles that are still taking place across the world: the human rights

violations, the undermining of democracy and the shrinking space for civil society.

Ever since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, civil society and human rights defenders have contributed to the promotion and protection of human rights through peaceful dialogue and building pluralistic democracies.

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supporter of civil society and we will continue our efforts to act and speak out against harassment and intimidation of civil society, including women and youth organisations. Support for human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, is at the core of the EU's external human rights policy and one of its major priorities. The EU is the leading worldwide donor to local civil society organisations, providing 2 billion euros each year, two thirds of the global support.

On this day, the EU also reaffirms its firm commitment to the multilateral human rights system as the platform for the international community to best address human rights violations and to seek accountability, both at international and regional level. By implementing the international human rights framework within our Union, we hold ourselves to the same standards that we expect from our partner countries across the world. This includes our continuous quest to improve the human rights situation at home and abroad.

By doing so, we continue to honour the commitment made 70 years ago, at the heart of which lie the fundamental fact that all human beings are born free and equal, and the notion that we all need to act in a spirit of respect and solidarity.



## INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY Kampala, 10th December 2018

### LET US STAND UP FOR RIGHTS FOR ALL

Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) joins the world in celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The theme for this year is 'Stand up for human rights,' and it is in this spirit that the Ugandan government and all its organs and agents ought to respect, promote and protect human rights for its entire citizenry.

The theme for this year recalls the important principle that although human rights are inherent and not given by the state, there is need to constantly protect and defend them - to stand up for them. Not standing up for human rights makes them susceptible to violation by different actors.

Human rights organisations in Uganda continue to be intimidated. In February this year, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum's (HRAPF) offices were broken into for the second time in a period of two years, and the guards on duty beaten to near death. This break-in and the first one in May 2016 in which a guard was murdered have not been satisfactorily investigated and no one has been prosecuted for them despite the evidence available. Many other organisations have suffered similar fates. Such uninvestigated break-ins leave human rights organisations in fear and create uncertainty making it difficult for them to stand up for

human rights. There is need for human rights organisations and human rights defenders to be more protected and to be afforded the necessary space to do their work as required by the *United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*.

Another important principle that this year's theme brings out is that human rights are for all without discrimination. Every person is entitled to them by virtue of being human. This includes minorities and marginalised groups, including sexual and gender minorities. Sexual and gender minorities continue to be left behind in terms of protection, and their attempts to stand up for their rights are usually thwarted by the state and non state actors. Of recent, the state has resorted to stopping meetings and events organised by sexual and gender minorities, and those that include such minorities even when organised by state entities, basing on the criminalisation of 'carnal knowledge against the order of nature' in section 145 of the Penal Code Act Cap 120.

This state of affairs makes it almost impossible for members of these groups to realise their rights, let alone stand up for them. The state has also continued to condone acts of violence and intimidation of gender and sexual minorities by non-state actors, as such cases usually go uninvestigated and are

usually not punished.

The infringement on the rights of a particular section of Uganda's citizenry on the basis of the fact that they are criminalised and considered immoral, and therefore social misfits, is not only a road block to success in the country's fight against HIV, but is also a gross violation of the principle of 'equality and dignity in rights for all,' on which the UDHR is hinged. It also goes against the Constitutional Court's decision in the case of *Adrian Juuko v Attorney General*, Constitutional Petition No. 1 of 2009, in which the Court nullified a provision of the Equal Opportunities Commission Act that declared some groups of people to be unworthy of accessing the Equal Opportunities Commission by virtue of their behavior.

HRAPF therefore calls upon the Government of Uganda, to make the environment more friendly to human rights defenders, including those working on sexual and gender minorities issues and to bring to book perpetrators of acts of violence and intimidation against human rights defenders.

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