

Security intact, but sporadic

By Pascal Kwesiga

In the still of the night, on April 27, criminals armed with machetes and clubs raided residential areas in Kisaasi in Kisaasi, a Kampala suburb, broke into houses, at a time when most of the occupants were asleep.

In some cases, they mugged their victims who tried to put up a fight, but they (occupants) were overwhelmed and their household property was stolen by the criminals.

In one incident, the marauding thugs during a raid recorded between 2:00am and 4:00am raped a lady who was living alone in a rented room.

"I was raped by three men. I had no idea that some people had broken into the house until I noticed that one of them was trying to rape me. They raped me in turns," a rape victim said.

The incidents happened in an area located between two Police posts, with one of them a few metres after an intersection at Kisaasi on the Northern Bypass. But the Police had no idea the residents in a stone's throw away from them were attacked until complaints were filed in the morning of April 28.

"There are many thugs in this area, but we have not been able to get any so far. But we shall put them out action once we get them," a Police officer at one of the posts, threatened.

But the residents in the area have an idea on who the thugs that terrorise them could be.

"We suspect it is a group of men we see around spending all their time during day smoking marijuana and performing gymnastic feats in this area. They do not work. All they do is to smoke all day," a landlord, who asked not to be named for security reasons, said.

The landlord says the suspects would have been reported to the LCI officials if the village local administrative structures were operating legally and had the legal mandate.

"In the past, suspected criminals would be reported to the LCI committee members, who helped control crime. Today, criminals are going about their business freely because there are no LCIs," he adds.

Such is the dilemma Kampala dwellers in some suburbs have to deal with every day in the absence of LCI system, which was effective in controlling crime in villages in the 1990s.

The situation highlights the fact that while national security has remained intact one year into President Yoweri Museveni's current five-year term, personal security leaves a lot to be desired.

The Government has almost defeated all the armed groups that declared war on Uganda in the past, but the criminal gangs. Although not armed with rifles, they are currently terrorising the people, presenting serious security concerns for the population.

In his 2016-2021 electoral manifesto, Museveni discusses the success of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) on



The UPDF continues to shine by discharging the mandate of protecting territorial integrity

promoting peace and stability, good governance, democracy and security in chapter one and assures Ugandans that the gains will be consolidated.

"The NRM has a sterling record of performance that no other party can measure to, let alone challenge. It has stood the test of time and its experience in ensuring peace and security, and macroeconomic stability is unmatched," Museveni stated in his manifesto, "Uganda is now secure and the situation will be maintained under NRM leadership."

During a televised presidential debate in the run up to the February 18, 2016 elections, Museveni remarked that no one shall 'joke' with the security of the country as long as he is President.

Museveni's remarks were provoked by stinging criticism from opposition candidate, Kizza Besigye, over deployment of Ugandan army by the president to DRC almost 20 years ago without parliamentary approval, the plunder of DR Congo's mineral resources by Uganda army officials and the resultant repatriation debt the country owes the unstable neighbour for plundering her resources.

To many, the rising wave of criminality, involving criminals breaking into houses and stealing people's property, has been partly blamed on the economic hardships arising from unemployment and loss of (economic) opportunities.

The unemployment has been compounded by the rising population of the youth with the economy growing at a slow rate and creating few jobs to absorb the increasing numbers of people.

As a result, in terms of personal security, Museveni's first term in



FDC's Ssemujju says the President is preoccupied with the security of the regime

office has been partly overshadowed by acts of criminality by organised criminal gangs against helpless citizens.

Was LCI system significant?

During the five-year National Resistance Army (NRA) guerrilla war, the fighters led by Museveni, set up the resistance councils (RCs) in areas they had 'liberated', and on taking over power in January 1986, they were transformed into LCIs and rolled out across the country. They played a significant role in working with the security forces to try to eradicate crime.

But Uganda last had elections for LCI chairpersons in 2001 and the Constitutional Court, in 2006, declared the persons still holding the positions of (LCI chairpersons) illegal.

In the absence of the functional LCI structures in the village for



Police spokesperson says community policing and patrols have been stepped up

over 15 years, criminal activities at the village level have thrived, with wrongdoers committing crime and getting away with it. Currently, the closest law enforcement structures are Police posts located in the city suburbs and at sub-counties in districts.

But the Police are not in close touch with the communities and some people do not report crimes to the poorly-facilitated force for fear of being victimised and demands for financial facilitation to handle their cases.

Some of the people view the Police as an instrument of torture and violence on account of its approach to policing and the force has, by and large, failed to shake off that negative reputation.

Indeed, the comments Museveni made when he visited the home of the slain Assistant Inspector of Police (AIGP), Andrew Felix

Kaweesi, lend credence to the negative reputation the people have about the police.

Kaweesi was gunned down, together with his body guard, Kenneth Erau, and driver, Godfrey Mambewa, near his (Kaweesi's) home in Kulambiro, a Kampala suburb, on March 17.

Museveni said the institution of the Police has been infiltrated by criminals and that the public fear to report criminal cases to the force for fear of being victimised.

The infiltration of the Police by criminals, the President said, has compromised the investigations, especially into the high-profile murders — involving the Muslim clerics — who have systematically executed in the same patterns for the past five years. There has never been a report into the killings expect the arrest of the suspects currently undergoing trial at the High Court.

"All these murders, I have followed myself. There are always clues leading to the criminals but the criminals have infiltrated the police," the president said, "You get a situation where they are intimidating the witnesses, killing the witnesses. That is why the public fears to give information to the Police," the President told mourners.

He cited a case in Rakai district where the Police arrested people for volunteering information about a man who reportedly killed nine people recently.

"Instead of arresting this man, the Police arrested the informers. The Police have been infiltrated by criminals, especially the CID (Criminal Investigations Directorate) group," Museveni stated.

Death threats

Similar gangs have also been attacking people in some parts in the central region and in some cases, dropped flyers in a number of villages informing people of the impending attacks against innocent civilians.

Richard Kitenda, the LCI vice-chairman in Busukuma village in Nansana municipality in Wakiso district, said flyers circulated in the area on Easter eve (April 15) threatening the launch an attack on them on Easter. He says residents are still living in fear.

"We informed the Police and they deployed. But they have since left and people are living in fear. Some relocated to other places on Easter fearing the attack. Some have returned, but they do not feel secure," Kitenda says.

If the LCI system was functional, he said, they would have called council meetings and rallied residents to try to defeat the criminal activities.

However, the recent allocation of sh15b for LCI elections by Parliament in the next budget has reignited hopes that the polls could be conducted before the end of this year.

Misdiagnosis

David Pulkol, the director at the Africa Leadership Institute and former (director) of the Internal Security Organisation (ISO), says it is unfortunate the President is still

criminality worries Ugandans

basking in his past glory and is not coming to terms with the reality.

The fact that Museveni's current term was greeted by the resumption of attacks on security personnel by civilians in the Rwenzori sub-region implies that the Government has failed to diagnose the sources of insecurity and is choosing to bury its head in the sand.

Over 100 people, including 16 Police officers, were killed in clashes between security forces and suspected royal guards and royalists of the Obusinga bwa Rwenzururu around the palace of their cultural leader — Charles Wesley Mumbere — and in various areas in Kasese district last November.

The security forces, mainly the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF), which led the operation in the sub region, have been criticised harshly for deploying excessive firepower against civilians who were armed with rudimentary weapons such as spears and arrows.

But the UPDF top brass, including Museveni, the Commander-in-Chief, defended the firepower deployed, insisting that they were confronting a militia group that, in some cases, used improvised explosive devices against members of the armed forces. Over 90 people, mainly civilians, were killed in similar attacks on security installations by the suspected Rwenzururu royalists in Kasese, Ntoroko and Bundibugyo districts in 2014.

The people of Kasese voted overwhelmingly for the Opposition at all levels in the last year's election, and there were voices that the security forces provoked the attacks last November to punish them. But the Government denies the claims.

The pending investigations into the murder of Muslim clerics and failure by the security forces to compile reports about the high-profile killings, including the assassination of Joan Kagezi, the assistant Director of Public Prosecutions and head of International Criminal Division in the justice and constitutional affairs ministry in March 2015, should get the President thinking twice about the security situation, according to Pulkol.

The other probable cause of the current insecurity, Pulkol, who is also the executive committee member for Africa Security Sector Network, says could be the criminal force that has been established by the security forces to catch criminals.

Pulkol explains that the President's confession that the Police have been infiltrated by criminals, but later renewing the contract of the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Gen. Kale Kayihura, for three more years, raises questions.

"If someone has performed dismally, why renew his contract? How did criminals infiltrate the Police?" he asks. "Information has started coming in, indicating the insecurity is planned by the state so that people can start saying *Mzee* should not go and the constitution will be changed. But that will come at a cost. People are dying," says Pulkol.



President Yoweri Museveni said the Police has been infiltrated by criminals

Regime security versus human security

The Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and Kira municipality MP, Ibrahim Ssemujju, said the President is preoccupied with the security of the regime, but not the people and that truly none of the previous regime leaders matches his resoluteness in protecting it (regime).

"Once the regime is preoccupied with its own security, the population suffers and that is the effect. Indeed, no one matches this regime in terms of personnel, resources and arsenal at its disposal. In fact, Museveni would be shocked if you asked him about the security in the country. He knows it is okay."

With the Police numbers increasing and UPDF free from battle operations, the people should have been more secure today than before, according to Ssemujju. The current security, he said, cannot be entirely blamed on the economic hardships, but also on the culture and moral corruption.

Uganda is peaceful

The deputy director of the Uganda Media Centre, Col. (rtd.) Shaban Bantariza, said the country's security should not be viewed in the prism of bouts of insecurity orchestrated by criminal gangs.

According to him, the President has maintained security as he promised, but incidents involving criminal gangs attacking innocent people may happen anytime anywhere in the world even in places which are regarded to be highly secure. The current criminal wave which the security forces are currently reversing, according to Bantariza, does not even constitute 2% insecurity.

Uganda, he added used to be plagued by insecurity in the past, and that the current crime wave is a question of law and order.

"You have people who pick up



Pulkol say Museveni is basking in the former glory of the past

arms and knives and kill others in the US. The recent attacks in Paris and other parts of Europe. Our security is still being maintained and there is no going backwards," Bantariza explained.

However, he said, the police should tighten the loose nuts in the city suburbs and other parts of the country to wipe out of criminality.

The Police spokesperson, Asan Kasingye, said the entire country is generally peaceful, despite pockets of criminality in some parts.

"There is no travel advisory against travelling into Uganda because of any security concerns. People drink and dance away nights in night clubs and get back home safely," he stated.

Uganda's stable security situation, he added, is illustrated by the large numbers of refugees fleeing into the country from their troubled homelands.

Uganda is currently hosting more than 1.2 million refugees, more than a half of them being South Sudanese who have since 2013 been escaping an unending conflict over power struggle in the world's newest nation. More thousands of refugees have fled from other



Mulongo says security agencies should be proactive

countries around Uganda where they do not feel secure — DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The Police mouthpiece says recent incidents of lawlessness in parts of greater Masaka area and later Wakiso, with some criminals dropping flyers to scare the population do not imply the country is insecure and that the criminal elements behind the recent criminality have been decisively 'defeated'.

"We have arrested over 100 suspects that have been behind the criminality in parts of Masaka, 60 in Wakiso and 50 in Kampala. We know them and their planners and they have also confessed. They wanted to scare people so they can commit the crimes," Kasingye adds.

He stated that community policing and patrols have been stepped up and all that needs to be done is to raise vigilance levels in the communities to defeat crime. The Police, Kasingye explained, have investigated and apprehended suspects in Muslim clerics' murders.

The DPP, he said, concluded there is a prima facie case against all the suspects based on the available

evidence collected by police and forwarded them to courts of law for prosecution.

"It is only in the murder of Kagezi where we have not arrested any suspects yet. That does not mean we shall not arrest them and hand them to courts of law. Even in the democracies we talk about, there are cases as old as 15 years. In the murder of AIGP Kaweesi, we have arrested 13 people and are being prosecuted," Kasingye says.

The UPDF spokesperson, Brig. Richard Karemeire, says the Police — the lead agency in maintaining law and order — are reversing the lawless situation, but added that the entire country is generally peaceful.

"The situation is not out of hand. Because people have enjoyed unprecedented security for years, such incidents have to scare them and they have to be reassured."

The UPDF and sister security agencies, he says, have continued to maintain security and defeated the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) as well as neutralising other armed rebel groups such as Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) that previously posed significant security threats.

UPDF returning home

The UPDF is currently withdrawing from the Central African Republic (CAR), where it has since 2009 been working with the US Special Forces to hunt down LRA rebels and their leader Joseph Kony. Although Kony has not been captured during the hunt, it is said that the LRA has been degraded to the level that it can no longer wreak havoc in Uganda. It is believed that LRA which was 8,000 members strong in 2006 is now composed of between 90 and 100 troops.

"UPDF continues to shine. We are discharging our mandate of protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity. UPDF has sharp teeth and it is supported by the people," Karemeire says, "No one group poses a military threat to Uganda now."

"We have denied the Al Shabab terrorists means to make war because UPDF liberated most of the big towns. UPDF which is under African Union Mission in Somalia section one secured the recent national elections and that is our big achievement. But we are not going to be in Somalia forever," Karemeire stated.

Simon Mulongo, an analyst on security matters, concurs with the security agencies that the country's security is generally stable and said there are no substantial threats to Uganda's territorial integrity.

"We only have incidents of crime involving killings and this is worrying the people. We call it negative peace because people are not happy and do not feel secure. That is not good and the security agencies should reverse the situation urgently," he added.

With one year in office, Mulongo explained that the general security situation has remained stable, but the safety of some people is being threatened by pockets of insecurity.

"Security agencies need to get to the top of the situation and restore the confidence of the public."