

4 May 2018

## **Uganda: HRDs, Tom and Esther Bagoole, threatened and attacked in their home**

In the early hours of Tuesday 1 May 2018, at least four armed men entered the home of **Tom and Esther Bagoole** in the outskirts of Kampala. The human rights defenders were threatened, and two of the men beat Tom Bagoole in an apparent reprisal for their human rights work.

[Tom Bagoole](#) and [Esther Bagoole](#) are the founders of Healing Focus Orphanage Centre (HFOC), a Ugandan NGO that has been running a school for orphans in Busiuro Village in Luuka, Uganda since 2010. Esther Bagoole is also the founder and managing director of Femled, a Ugandan NGO that has had success in reducing the number of under-age and forced marriages and teenage pregnancies in the area. Femled's initiatives have, however, been met with considerable male opposition in the locality.

At 3:00am on 1 May 2018, Tom and Esther Bagoole and their three young sons were awoken by at least four men armed with guns and pangas (machetes). Two of the men beat Tom and threatened his wife and children, whilst the other men stole televisions, mobile phones, and other valuables. The men told the human rights defenders that they were acting under "messages" and that unless the "projects" in Busiuro Village stopped, they would return and kill Tom Bagoole.

In Busiuro, Tom Bagoole was actively pursuing some men who had raped two female boarders at the HFOC school. One of the perpetrators, a powerful individual in the village, was jailed last year after Tom Bagoole pursued the case with Plan International, but he later jumped bail. The Police Commissioner in Kampala investigated and sacked local police officers for protecting the culprit.

The police were summoned after the attack but did not arrive until 14:00 on Wednesday 2 May, and demanded money before proceeding to take a statement. Tom Bagoole made a police statement but remains considerably traumatised and is finding it difficult to speak.

Front Line Defenders is concerned for the safety of Tom and Esther Bagoole and their family. It condemns the attack on Tom Bagoole and the intimidation of both human rights defenders, which it believes is related to their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights.

### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Uganda to:**

1. Strongly condemn the intimidation and threats against Tom and Esther Bagoole;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the physical assault and intimidation of Tom Bagoole with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take urgent measures, in consultation with the defenders, to ensure their safety and that of their family;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Uganda are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.