

14 September 2017

Uganda: Human rights defender James Rukanpana shot by armed guards

On 12 September 2017, human rights defender James Rukanpana was shot and severely wounded by armed guards believed to work for the company Ferdsult Engineering Services Limited, whose activities he and fellow human rights defenders have actively been campaigning against.

On 12 September 2017, armed guards believed to have contracts with Ferdsult Engineering Services Limited harassed and chased away local community members who were using the lakes for fishing and collecting water. Such activities remain legal on the basis of a [decision](#) by the Magistrates Court of Fort Portal in June 2017. The armed guards entered James Rukanpana's plantation which is located next to one of the crater lakes. James Rukanpana was targeted and shot by the guards in both legs. The human rights defender was then taken to a local hospital for treatment.

James Rukanpana has been actively involved in advocating for the rights of the local communities to access the crater lakes for water and domestic fishing. This has included participating in radio talk shows, and mobilising the local community who use the crater lakes to challenge actions of Ferdsult Engineering Services Limited in court. He also organised transport for community members to attend the court hearing in Fort Portal against Ferdsult Engineering Services Limited and the Kabarole District Local Government.

The shooting of James Rukanpana follows a pattern of targeting TLC and its members. On 23 June 2017, Erasmus Irumba, who was the coordinator of TLC's activities in Ntoroko District, was shot and [killed](#) by security forces. On 7 June 2017, fabricated charges against [four human rights defenders](#) working for TLC were dropped when the Magistrate Court in Fort Portal rendered void an agreement between Ferdsult Engineering Services Limited and Kabarole District Local Government Council which had granted the company sole access to the disputed 20 crater lakes. The court ruled that this agreement was an infringement of human rights of the community.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns and expresses serious concern about the shooting of James Rukanpana. Front Line Defenders urges Ugandan authorities to ensure the safety and security of members of the Twerwaneho Listeners Club, as this incident is one in a series of attacks against the organisation.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Uganda to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of James Rukanpana as well as of other members of Twerwaneho Listeners Club;
2. Strongly and immediately condemn the shooting of James Rukanpana as it is believed that it was solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;

3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the shooting of James Rukanpana, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Uganda and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.