

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and Chapter Four Uganda jointly submitted a petition to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of Stella Nyanzi

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On April 24, 2017, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and [Chapter Four Uganda](#) jointly submitted [a petition](#) to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of Stella Nyanzi. Ms. Nyanzi is a prominent human rights defender, social activist, and academic in Uganda. Ms. Nyanzi has been arbitrarily detained by Ugandan authorities since April 7, 2017, and was charged with cyber harassment and offensive communication on April 10, 2017, for her Facebook posts criticizing Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni.

As a leading voice on sexual freedom and women's rights, Ms. Nyanzi has long defended LGBTI rights in Uganda. As a social and political activist, she has not been afraid of speaking out against the government's misconduct. Recently, her criticism of President Museveni and the First Lady and Minister of Education Janet Museveni centered around their [backtracking of an electoral promise](#) to provide free sanitary pads to schoolgirls. Ms. Nyanzi started [a campaign](#) in March, 2017 to provide the pads herself, which has collected thousands of dollars and gained widespread publicity.

Ms. Nyanzi's arrest comes after weeks of government harassments against her. She was summoned by police for [hours of interrogation](#) regarding her social media posts about President Museveni and the First Lady. She was also blocked from [boarding a plane](#) to an academic conference in the Netherlands. She was even [suspended from her job](#) as a research fellow at Makerere University for criticizing the First Lady. Moreover, armed individuals [raided her home and threatened](#) her three children and a domestic worker, and her sister was also trailed by armed individuals.

On April 7, 2017, [Ms. Nyanzi was arrested](#) by armed plainclothes police officers after speaking at a conference in Kampala. She was [physically assaulted](#) and was not allowed to see her lawyer, Nicholas Opiyo from Chapter Four Uganda, for 18 hours. After spending three nights at a local police station, she appeared before a court on April 10, 2017, and was [charged](#) on two counts of cyber harassment and offensive communications for her Facebook posts this year, particularly one in which she referred President Museveni as a "pair of buttocks."

Although she pleaded not guilty to both charges, Ms. Nyanzi and her lawyers were caught off guard by the prosecution's application to have Ms. Nyanzi's [sanity ascertained](#), which was served to them at the court. The court declined to hear Ms. Nyanzi's [bail application](#) until after disposing the prosecution's application for mental examination. The case was adjourned to April 25, 2017, and Ms. Nyanzi was remanded to Luzira prison, the only maximum security prison in the country. On April 12, 2017, government hospital doctors attempted to conduct [a forced medical examination](#) on her without her consent or court order. It has also been reported that she is being allowed [fewer visits](#) than the norm.

Ms. Nyanzi's arrest and continued detention violate multiple provisions of both Ugandan Constitution and international human rights treaties to which Uganda is a party. As detailed in the petition, Ms. Nyanzi's detention is arbitrary because she was arrested, detained, and charged without proper legal justification; because her detention resulted from her peaceful exercise of her rights to freedom of expression and association; because the government denied her due process rights required under international law; and because she was targeted by the government in part because of her political opinion. Her bail hearing was

scheduled for April 25, 2017, but proceedings were postponed to May 10.