

23 July 2021

Uganda: Judicial harassment and sexual assault of woman human rights defender Florence Orishaba

On 22 July 2021, woman human rights defender **Florence Orishaba** appeared before the High Court of Uganda. She has been charged with “inciting violence”, “defamation of a government official” and “promoting defiance among communities”. On 19 July 2021, the woman human rights defender was provisionally released from arbitrary detention at the Mbarara Central Police Station. On July 4 2021, Florence Orishaba was abducted and sexually assaulted by individuals believed to be plain clothed security officers, before she was officially detained in the Mbarara Central Police Station.

[Florence Orishaba](#) is a woman human rights defender, land rights defender and the executive director of [Defence For Human Rights \(DEFOHR\)](#). DEFOHR is a Ugandan non profit organisation that works to defend human rights by sensitizing communities to their rights and violations of their rights. On 1 July 2021, DEFOHR debuted a project which involved weekly radio talk show appearances from Florence Orishaba to sensitize communities regarding their human rights and how to handle human rights violations. DEFOHR had previously run a program that involved educating the public regarding their rights through radio shows.

On 4 July 2021, Florence Orishaba was exiting a local radio station after being hosted as part of DEFOHR’s project, when she was approached by unknown individuals in plain clothes. She told Front Line Defenders that she was sexually assaulted by the individuals and taken to an unknown location. Later the same evening the individuals, who the woman human rights defender believes to be security officers, turned her in to the Mbarara Central Police Station where she was detained with no charges for 15 days, which is long past the 48 hours stipulated by the Ugandan Constitution. On 7 July she was granted access to her lawyer and DEFOHR’s program coordinator, however, during her detention she was denied access to her family, allegedly due to COVID-19 guidelines. Despite her lawyer urging for her release based on her arbitrary detention, Florence Orishaba was only provisionally released on 19 July 2021.

The woman human rights defender’s arrest was preceded by threatening messages sent to the coordinators of DEFOHR on their personal mobile telephones. The threats started following the debut of DEFOHR’s radio talk show project, which is in collaboration with six local radio station. During the shows, the woman human rights defender discusses property rights, specifically land rights of women and children.

On 22 July 2021, woman human rights defender Florence Orishaba was charged with “inciting violence”, “defamation of a government official” and “promoting defiance among communities”. The case has been adjourned to 28 July 2021. As a response to the unlawful detention of Florence Orishaba and the assault against her, DEFOHR will be submitting a petition on 28 July 2021 to the High Court to seek an investigation into the matter.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned by the arbitrary detention, abduction and sexual assault of woman human rights defender Florence Orishaba and believes that she is being targeted solely as a result of her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Uganda to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the detention, abduction and sexual assault of Florence Orishaba, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the allegations of threats to Defence for Human Rights (DEFOHR) and its members, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Immediately drop all charges against Florence Orishaba as it is believed that they are solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
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.