



Activists urge NRM to desist from targeting critical reporting

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KAMPALA. Human rights defenders have asked the ruling NRM government to desist from targeting critical and independent reporting of political campaigns in the run up to the February 18, general election.

The activists, under Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U), said yesterday that they are distressed by the NRM complaint lodged before the statutory Media Council over a *Daily Monitor* newspaper story.

The story attributed to the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) presidential candidate, Dr Kizza Besigye alleges that the NRM government has been the most corrupt since independence.

Mr Robert Ssempala, the national coordinator of HRNJ-Uganda, said: "The media play a very crucial role in entrenching a systematic and progressing democratic society, and, therefore, there is need to ensure a conducive working environment, most importantly as they cover this political campaign."

In a statement issued last Friday, Mr Ssempala said the complaint by the NRM is devoid of merit and substance, solely intended to stifle, intimidate and silence the *Daily Monitor* newspaper and other media houses from fulfilling their obligation of delivering information without fear or favour.

On February 9, the Legal Department of NRM petitioned the Media Council over the *Daily Monitor* story published on February 5, under the title: "NRM most corrupt government - Besigye" in which Dr Besigye was quoted alleging that, "since independence, there is no government that has been as corrupt as this..."

The ruling party accuses the newspaper of "false, reckless and exaggerated unfair reporting by a newspaper."

But Mr Ssempala said the role of the *Daily Monitor* in particular and the media in general, in a pluralistic society, is not only to report what is favourable to the ruling party or any other political organisation but also to disseminate information which may even be disturbing and annoying to certain sections of the society.

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