

Govt gagging media - global rights body

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KAMPALA. A rights body that tracks global media freedom has warned that media houses that do not bow to pressures from the ruling National Resistance Movement [NRM] are being singled out for attacks.

The Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RWF) warned that as the election campaign hits the final stretch, attacks on media personnel have hit the peak, effectively frustrating the coverage of the elections.

RWF's warning singled out Saturday's arrest of a British Broadcasting Service (BBC) crew that was filming Abim hospital in north east-

ern Uganda. The hospital became a particular source of controversy after FDC presidential candidate Kizza Besigye visited it and said its dilapidated state illustrates the state of the health sector under President Museveni's government.

"What happened to the BBC crew is just one example among dozens of cases of threats and intimidation of Ugandan journalists which have increased since the start of the election campaign. We urge the authorities to end this campaign of media control and intimidation so that the entire Ugandan people can have transparent and peaceful elections," the RWF statement read in part.

According to Mr Rob-

ert Sempala of the Human Rights Network for Journalists, more than 40 journalists have been arrested, beaten, prevented from working or deprived of their equipment by police since October.

However, deputy government spokesman Shaban Bantariza rejected the accusations, saying the emergence of radio stations in the country is enough testimony of a conducive media environment.

RWF's statement comes a month after the New York-based Human Rights Watch released a report detailing abuses journalists have endured during the campaigns, warning that the attacks have led to a "chilling effect" for Ugandan media.