

The State has recently stepped up its campaign against CSOs it accuses of serving foreign interests.

BY FRANKLIN DRAKU

A number of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Uganda are in a tight corner after the government, through the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA), froze their bank accounts under unclear circumstances.

The CSOs affected include Agora Centre for Research, Chapter Four Uganda, African Institute for Investigative Journalism, Centre for Constitutional Governance, and The Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies.

Sources close to the investigations allege that over the past five years, two entities — Agora Centre for Research and the African Institute for Investigative Journalism — handled transactions amounting to Shs70 billion without disclosing either the source or the purpose of the funds.

"These accounts have been closely monitored by the Financial Intelligence Authority, and none of these people could account for the exact source of the money or its intended use. This prompted the government to block the accounts as investigations continue," the source said.

The National Bureau of Non-Governmental Organisations, security forces, and the FIA, have recently stepped up its campaign against CSOs, it accuses of serving foreign interests. Ten of these organisations were indefinitely suspended just two days before the January 15 presidential and parliamentary elections.

The suspended NGOs were never given a chance to defend themselves against the accusations.

This prompted the Uganda Law Society to drag the Attorney General of Uganda before the East African Court of Justice in Arusha.

Mr Samuel Wandera, the Executive Director of the FIA, confirmed on Wednesday that the authority had frozen accounts of some civil society organisations, though he declined to

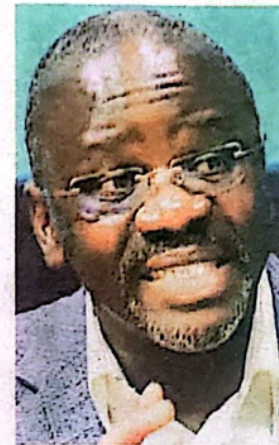
NGOs in a tight corner as govt freezes bank accounts



Agather Atuhaire, executive team leader, Agora Centre for Research



Solomon Sserwanja, ED, African Centre for Investigative Journalism



Godber Tumushabe, ED The Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies

reveal how many were affected. He also did not explain why the accounts were frozen.

"Our mandate allows us, when we are reviewing certain transactions, to halt them and then seek additional information from the account operator. Basically, that's what we are doing. We are just interested in certain transactions, and that's all," Mr Wandera said.

He added that when they suspect an account is involved in suspicious activity, they have the power to freeze it and request further clarification from the operator, which he described as "business as usual."

"We are supposed to work with the concerned civil society organisations that are affected to clarify some issues we are interested in. That's all. Once they are aware, they will contact us and then we meet," he said.

However, Mr Solomon Sserwanja, the executive director of the African Cen-

What FIA says.
Our mandate allows us, when we are reviewing certain transactions, to halt them and then seek additional information from the account operator. Basically, that's what we are doing," Samuel Wandera, executive director of FIA

tre for Investigative Journalism, said on Wednesday that they do not know why their accounts were frozen and have not received any explanation from FIA.

"I don't know, but what I know is the bank closed our accounts. So we are trying to find out why, but we can't transact. So that's it. We've officially reached out to the bank, but the bank hasn't responded to us yet," he said.

Ms Agather Atuhaire, the executive team leader for Agora Centre for Research, posted on her X page on March 16 that they had written to the bank

three weeks earlier demanding an explanation, which had not been provided by that date.

"We have nothing to fear. We even wrote to our bank requesting for an explanation three weeks ago that we have never received. And they must feel frustrated that we have continued to do the work they don't want us to do since they purported to suspend us and halt our transactions two months ago," she said.

Ms Sarah Bireete, the Executive Director of the Centre for Constitutional Governance, also posted on X: "It's amazing how this country is run on fake news disguised as security concerns; and how government punishes entities without a right to be heard. Citizens should challenge FIA to publish financial details of these NGOs in their possession."

Mr Godber Tumushabe wondered aloud why FIA seemed fixated on their organisation. "Sometimes you get the

THE NGOS AFFECTED

Affected: Agora Centre for Research, Chapter Four Uganda, African Institute for Investigative Journalism, Centre for Constitutional Governance, The Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies.

Reason given: FIA cites "suspicious transactions" worth Shs70 billion over five years, though no detailed explanation has been provided to NGOs.

impression that these FIA people either like The Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies or they are just redundant with this kind of stories," he wrote.

Mr Anthony Masake, the executive director of Chapter Four, said in an earlier interview that the freeze and suspension had crippled their ability to provide legal services, since they could not represent clients in court. He added that they had contacted authorities but received no response.

Mr Erias Lukwago, the Kampala Lord Mayor, said the freezing of accounts shows how far the government has gone in suppressing Ugandans' voices.

Mr Lukwago argued that recent events in Kenya, where civil society forced government accountability and youth-led civil disobedience shook the establishment, have spooked Uganda's ruling government. "And I'm sure Mr. Museveni is now worried about what is happening in Kenya. The civil society took centre stage during the Gen Z demonstration. So he's wary of that influence spilling over from Kenya to here."

Mr Lukwago urged the international community, bound by conventions and protocols, not to sit on their hands while the situation deteriorates in Uganda.

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