

Activists advocate for protection of rights of Ugandans to use Internet

By Lisa Nsaba

As the world prepares to celebrate Safer Internet day, Ugandan activists have called for the protection of people's Internet rights.

Unwanted Witness, a civil society organisation (CSO) working to promote effective communication through various online expression platforms, noted that the Government needs to revise the current existing Internet and media laws to be clearer on protection of rights for all Internet users. They said such a move would also properly spell out the penalties for those that abuse the rights.

Dorothy Mukasa, the acting chief executive officer of Unwanted Witness, expressed concern over increased restriction of Uganda's Internet usage.

According to Uganda Communications Commission statistics, 31% of Ugandans use the Internet.

While addressing journalists in Kampala yesterday, Mukasa noted that Ugandans have a right to freely use Internet as a means of expression, claiming that the right has instead been restricted by the state.

Mukasa has appealed to the Constitutional Court to quickly work on the case that was filed by NGOs

to review the Computer Misuse Act, among other laws.

"This Act is not at per with what the international laws provide because it infringes on people's privacy. The Act is commonly being used by state agents to clamp down on freedom of expression," she added.

This year's Safer Internet Day (SID) celebrations will take place on February 6 under the theme: "*Create, connect and share respect: A better Internet starts with you*", a call to action for every stakeholder to play their part in creating a better Internet for everyone, in particular, the youngest users.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Mukasa appealed to the Government to always give reports on why people's computers, passwords, phones are taken and never returned.

The Computer Misuse Act 2011, was designed to protect computer users against willful attacks and theft of information. Offences under the act include hacking, unauthorised access to computer systems and purposefully spreading malicious and damaging

software (malware), such as viruses.

"Its move to forcefully obtain computers, phones and email passwords contravenes article 29 of the 1995 Uganda Constitution, article 12 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," Mukasa said.

She appealed to the Government to always give reports on why people's computers, passwords, phones are taken and never returned. She said without such reports, fear is instigated among Ugandans, which restricts their use of Internet, hence intruding on their rights to Internet and intrusion of privacy.

Mukasa noted that there are people who misuse the Internet by circulating false information and cyber-bullying. She says they should be punished according to the law.

She called for Parliament to amend all repressive cyber laws which are preventing people from fully utilising their right to use the Internet.

When contacted, Ofwono Opondo, the Government spokesperson, challenged the Unwanted Witness to provide concrete evidence that the Government is controlling the Internet and using the Computer Misuse Act to compromise users' privacy.

KCCA gives 48

By Juliet Waiswa

Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) has given owners the 48 schools which are facing closure up to February 5 this year to improve their standards or else they lose their licences.

During a meeting held with 48 heads of schools on Monday in the office of the director of education services, the teachers were warned that if they do not abide by the set KCCA standards, KCCA will also block parents from taking their children to schools.

"KCCA met the heads of schools and told them to comply with the standards and that if they do not, they shall tell parents not to take their children to the said schools," said the director of public and community affairs, Peter Kaujuu said.

The affected schools, including those to Kaujuu, fall short of the required standards and requirements as specified by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES).

The closure that takes effect in nursery, primary and secondary schools, could last for a few weeks to the beginning of the next school term.

"These schools were inspected and found to have unsafe conditions,"