

Arrested cops plead for their ATM cards, mobile phones

By John Agaba

Police officers who were recently arrested and charged with criminal offenses have pleaded with the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI) to pass on their bank ATM cards and phones, which were confiscated on arrest, to their relatives, the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) said yesterday.

The UHRC said following the “uncoordinated” statements from the Police, some suggestive the forces did not know reasons their colleagues were being arrested, it got “concerned” and paid the arrested officers a visit.

Acting UHRC chairperson. Meddie Mulumba said in a press briefing at the commission’s head office yesterday that they dispatched a team to “verify” actual detention places, process of arrest, and officers’ conditions in detention and how they were being facilitated to access justice.

“Some of the arrested senior Police officers, who said they were breadwinners of their families, appealed to the commission team

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Mabiho called upon the Government to fulfill its obligations under the 1951 UN Convention that provide for the protection of refugees of which Uganda ratified.

to intervene and cause part of their properties that were confiscated on arrest and recorded on the arrested person’s property forms, to be passed on to their next of kin. This was in respect of bank ATM cards and telephone sets that were loaded with mobile money, among others, to cater for the upkeep of their families,” said the acting commission chairperson.

Efforts to seek comment from CMI on the officers’ pleas were futile.

The commission urged the arresting authorities to “consider the suspects’ plea provided the property in question is not a subject of the investigations”.

The commission observed that the accused officers were in “good health”

and said they had got first-hand information (from the accused) that they had not been tortured, contrary to some reports.

The acting chairperson, however, said he could not comment on whether it was right or wrong for the Police officers to be tried by an Army Court.

“I think some provisions in the law allow for the officers to be tried by the Court Martial. But I cannot give my opinion. It is sub judice,” he added.

The commission said the aggrieved (with decision to try the suspects before the General Court Martial) could also use “available legal processes such as taking the matter to the Constitutional Court for interpretation”.

“The arrest of the Police officers, including the head of the Police Professional Standards Unit, was an indictment on the Uganda Police Force. We call on the Police to clean its house by taking due diligence in its recruitment process, offering continuous training to its officers and punishing any acts of indiscipline and

unprofessionalism by its officers,” he said.

UHRC secretary Patrick Mabiho Nyakana called upon the Government to “pay special attention” to the Uganda Police Force in an effort to “restructure and retool the institution”.

At the same briefing, the commission condemned the October 28 attack on Nakivale refugee camp in Isingiro district, which resulted in the death of a 14-year-old Deo Kijuji Ishime and left several others injured.

“The commission condemns the loss of life in the Saturday incident and is gravely concerned by the laxity in the security at the camp,” Mulumba said.

He said their team established that the camp did not have “adequate” Police posts to respond to security matters in time.

Mabiho called on the Government, through its implementing arms such as the Police and the Office of the Prime Minister, to fulfill its obligations under the 1951 UN Convention, the UDHR and the regional instruments that provide for the protection of refugees, of which Uganda ratified.

Seven senior Police officers, namely senior commissioner Joel Aguma, who is the head of the Forces Professional Standards Unit, Senior Superintendent of Police Nixon Agasiirwe and detective assistant superintendent of Police James Magada were arrested on October 24 in connection with torture and kidnap of refugees. Other officers arrested include assistant inspector of Police Benon Atwebembeire, detective sergeant Abel Tumukunde, special Police Constable Faisal Katende and Corporal Amon Kwarisima. There were also two foreigners: Rene Rutangungira of Rwandan origin and Bahati Mugenga, a Congolese national, apprehended in relation to the damning assaults on refugees.

ARRESTED