Global Rights Alert Summary Civic Space Related Engagements with Government Entities

1. Conduct a Regional Dialogue on Civic Space

In July 2022, GRA conducted a regional dialogue on civic space in the Bunyoro sub-region where 57 people in total (13 F, 44 M) attended. As a result of the dialogue, there was clarity in terms of the fees payable by civil society organisations. The ED of the NGO Bureau clarified that fees being charged by local governments were illegal. Local government officials clarified that they were no longer charging such fees.

There was also commitment from the NGO Bureau to rectify a number of issues that had affected some CSOs. For instance, Midwestern Region Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (MICOD) is a fully compliant NGO and yet the NGO Bureau had erroneously not included them as a compliant organisation. Their issue was considered for resolution. The dialogue created a space where civil society and government could hold each other accountable. From the meeting, civil society organisations asked the NGO Bureau to accord them fair hearings while NGO Bureau asked them to be fully compliant with the legal and regulatory framework in place. A number of concerns were taken note of by the bureau to be considered in the review of the NGO Policy process such as creating regional offices.

2. Quarterly Engagements with District Officials in Hoima

In April 2022, GRA attended a quarterly meeting between CSOs and district officials in Hoima district which was attended by 38 people (17 F 21 M).

Civil Society Organisations raised the following issues:

- The various fees levied have frustrated the work being done by the various NGOs in the district especially those that are fairly new. The exorbitant fees have made it difficult to comply with the district leadership
- The District NGO Monitoring Committee has not been active and hence this explains why NGOs have not complied by registering with the district and entering into MoUs with the same
- NGOs requested for a scheduled timeframe for when District NGO Management Committee meets to ensure that the Committee is aware of the challenges being faced by the NGOs in the district
- There was heated debate on the persistent clamping down of NGO activities by the Hoima District Local Government. Some members present made it clear that NGO efforts are meant to assist the government and not to be subversive. They reasoned that frustrating NGO work is a double-edged sword that will merely curtail development in the district. NGOs called upon the district leadership to embrace dialogue and collegiality as opposed to issuing of threats and directives during such meetings.
- GRA called upon the district to embrace business and human rights in its approaches. We reminded the leadership that the state has an obligation to respect, protect and promote human rights in their programming.

The meeting however agreed to the following resolutions:

- The meeting agreed that the District NGO Monitoring Committee would meet NGOs operating in the district two weeks at the end of every quarter at the district offices
• The NGOs appointed a representative called Mr Dickens Amany to the District NGO Monitoring Committee
• NGOs agreed to help the district in compiling an inventory for the NGOs in the district. They agreed to share their information before close of April
• NGOs also agreed to share a file of their work plans and budgets with the district leadership by next week with the CAO. Copies should be made and shared with the District Internal Security Officer (DISO) and the Resident District Commissioner (RDC)