



**Human Rights Watch Statement
Universal Periodic Review - Uganda
General Debate**

Human Rights Watch welcomes the Human Rights Council's review of Uganda in October 2011 and its March 2012 adoption of the Universal Periodic Review report.

The Uganda delegation committed to adopt a National Action Plan on human rights, establish a human rights desk under the Minister of Justice and a cabinet sub-committee to provide guidance on human rights, and to mainstream rights training for security agencies. While these are important steps, the government should urgently and simultaneously take concrete action to address concerns over ongoing impunity and poor legislative proposals. If it fails to do so then these new efforts may duplicate existing initiatives, create more expensive bureaucracy, and all the while failing to fundamentally improve rights protections.

We welcome that Uganda accepted key recommendations to take immediate steps to investigate the use of excessive force and incidents of torture by security forces, and prosecute and punish the perpetrators, as required by the Ugandan constitution. Possible financial compensation via the Uganda Human Rights Commission, as argued by the delegation in its presentation, is not a sufficient remedy as it fails to punish perpetrators. Police and prosecutors should actively investigate the killings of at least 50 people during demonstrations in September 2009 and April 2011, locate and protect witnesses, and hold credible trials. In the only case known to Human Rights Watch where an alleged state agent has been put on trial—for the shooting death of a two-year old girl during the Masaka demonstrations in April 2011—the case has been pending in military courts since July 2011, apparently due to the infrequency of court sessions. No other cases have been brought by prosecutors despite ample physical evidence and numerous eyewitnesses.

It is regrettable that the government delegation "categorically refuted", during the UPR interactive dialogue, the existence and use of 'safe houses'—undesignated and unlawful sites of detention. There is ample evidence of their use, such as the case of Okello Mission, alias Ochi, detained from March 2010 to the present, among other individuals.

The government should also take concrete action to ensure respect for freedom of expression and assembly. These steps should go beyond the rhetoric of accepting specific UPR recommendations. In particular, the government should withdraw its pending Public Order Management Bill, which would permit the Inspector General of Police to control meetings of more than three people. The Bill was debated again in parliament in December 2011, following the Council's review of Uganda. The government has also failed to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression to Uganda while journalists have continued to face harassment and intimidation in carrying out their work.

The notorious Anti-Homosexuality Bill has also been reintroduced for debate in parliament. Not only would the bill require Uganda to withdraw from numerous human rights treaties, but it would criminalize legitimate human rights work and put major barriers in the path of effective HIV/AIDS prevention. While it is a private member's bill, the government should take specific steps to ensure the bill does not pass, and should seek to end discrimination, intimidation and harassment of members of the LGBT community.

Finally, we urge all governments to support a vigorous, transparent, and participatory follow-up mechanism to translate the UPR recommendations into meaningful action to improve conditions for all Ugandans.