



# Uganda Harm Reduction Network

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## UHRN COMPILED CASES OF DRUG USER ARRESTS IN UGANDA

On 6 December 2014, Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN) invited its members, partners and friends in Kabalagala Kataba to attend a victory ceremony to celebrate the UHRN's Soccer team's win for the **Mike Mabike's** Cup Tournament. The Cup Tournament was supported by former MP **Mike Mabike** of Makindye Division, and the victory ceremony was held at Miringo's residence in Kabalagala.

UHRN invited many stakeholders to the ceremony, for the purpose of:

- Raising awareness on the drug user's difficult experiences of drug addiction;
- Highlighting how UHRN members (drug users) had organized themselves to participate in a social cause such as a Soccer tournament and going ahead to win it.
- Changing the negative attitude of the community towards drug users which has increased stigma and discrimination and rejection among drug users thus blocking them from accessing health services just because they are seen and treated as criminals and a violent community.

UHRN also used the opportunity to challenge the police practice of arrest, unlawful detention, torture and illegal extortion of money from the drug users. The UHRN members testified that they are frequently targeted by the police, arrested and put under pressure to pay for their release though police bond is free according to Uganda's constitution.

The Former Hon. **Mike Mabike** the guest of honor in his speech he thanked Uganda Harm Reduction Network for organizing the youth who use drugs and other partners for supporting the youth who use drugs. He stressed that; ***"these are our brothers, friends, relatives and our fellow Ugandans.....they need our support just like any other Ugandan"***. He added that, ***"they have just proved to us and the whole World that they have great talents...Congratulations Youth....the police of Uganda should stop unlawfully arresting and detaining you...you need some interventions to lift***



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*you up such as income generating activities and more support for such recreation activities for you to engage in".* Members were moved by the speech. One of the drug user shouted *"they give us condoms instead of capital to start up small business."*

Unfortunately, on **8<sup>th</sup> December 2014**, two days after the victory ceremony, Police officers from the Kabalagala Police Station rounded up and arrested over **70** drug users in the same vicinity including UHRN's peer educators and members. Including Ameto Brian, a UHRN's peer educator who featured in an **Al Jazeera documentary** <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2014/10/pictures-uganda-thriving-drug-20141031101312851406.html> at **Ragga Bar** in Kabalagala, where he works with his other **15** colleagues who also inject drugs.

Brian tried to call Janefer in the middle of the night; a UHRN's paralegal/Outreach Coordinator and told her about his arrest and the massive arrest of other drug users. In the morning Janefer went to the police station to find out the charges and negotiate for the release of Brian and other drug users. The OC Station of Kabalagala police station told Janefer *"I was not the one who led the arrest operation....However, you know that Brian is an agent promoting drug use in Uganda, he has to take the police to the organization he claims to work for (UHRN) to help the police investigate how drugs get into the country and find out who are the agents. He confessed that he is a drug user during the Al Jazeera interview; therefore we can't release Brian on police bond. We are taking him to prison since he is our key suspect on our case of investigating drug abuse in Kabalagala."*

When the UHRN's paralegal team with our partner lawyers from Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (**HRAPF**) followed up the arrested drug users to **Luzira Court** the following morning, they were told to pay **UGX 700,000** for **court bail** for each drug user charged. **UHRN** could not afford to pay this money and **HRAPF** either.

Some of the drug users who were arrested on **8<sup>th</sup> December 2014** have now been released, with support from their families. Others, including Brian, are still in **Luzira prison**. Brian will be brought to court on **8<sup>th</sup> February 2015**. Mass arrests of drug users and female sex workers are ongoing. The police are justifying their arrest operations by saying that; *"the new Antinarcotics law has now been passed."* People who use drugs are also being charged under the **rogue and vagabond misdemeanour offences** in the Penal Code.



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## ***Cases of other arrested drug users post the passing of the anti-Narcotic Act in Uganda:***

- ✚ On 19 December 2014, 40 drug users were arrested and charged with drug-related offences (marijuana) and taken to Kyamugorani Prison. Ref CRB 475/2014. <http://chimpreports.com/40-arrested-over-marijuana-use/>.
- ✚ On 17 January 2015, 30 drug users were arrested in Zana. The drug users were taken to Katwe police station and detained.

### ***Some of the cases documented by UHRN Paralegal team:***

UHRN's paralegal team leader **Tushabe Janefer** was able to document **5 cases** for arrested drug users from different police stations in Kampala: Ref. Kasangati Ref; **SD/51/29/11/12**, Katwe Ref; **SD/31/14/01/12**, Natete; **SD/62/28/07/13**, Nsangi Ref; **SD/07/16/01/13** and CPs **SD/39/23/04/14**).

### **Note:**

Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN) a youth led organization established in 2011 and registered as company limited by guarantee; **Reg. No. 181733** to respond to the drug use crisis in Uganda. The organization works to advocate for practical interventions aimed at supporting and addressing the health and socio-economic rights for people who use drugs and also seeks to provide a national platform for health and policy programs that promote good practices and advocate for a supportive environment for the implementation and expansion of harm reduction programs for drug users. Currently UHRN is the only drug user organization advocating for adoption and inclusion of "harm reduction interventions" for drug users in Uganda.

**Vision:** A society where drug users are empowered to make informed decisions on the impacts of drugs and substance use and live a life that gives them hope in Uganda.

**Mission:** To improve the health and socio-economic well-being of drug users by offering prevention and intervention services aimed at reducing the harms associated with drug use in Uganda.