



International Community
of Women Living with HIV
Eastern Africa

PRESS STATEMENT

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Civil society response to President Museveni's directive that pregnant women will no longer be banned from using transport to seek health services during COVID19 lockdown:

The President of Uganda on April 19 2020 declared during his address to the country that pregnant women will no longer be required to seek Resident District Commissioners (RDC) permission to seek health care services.

This announcement came after civil society and Ugandan media [documented](#), [investigated and exposed](#) preventable deaths and suffering of pregnant women brought about by the transport ban. Civil society had also [petitioned the Prime Minister](#) and the [World Bank](#) before yesterday's announcement.

"The transport ban in Uganda caused immense harm, even death," said Nakibuuka Noor Musisi of Center for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD). "Pregnant women and all people in need of health services never should have been subjected to it. While we welcome this development, it has come far too late for many who have already died or suffered preventable complications as a result."

Civil society called for immediate implementation of this blanket exemption, through written communication to all RDCs, Local Council leaders, Local Defense Units and District Health Officers.

“We need further action beyond this directive. Children, people living with HIV or TB, and people with other chronic illnesses such as sickle cell anemia, diabetes and cancer must be able to obtain prompt health services even as the government responds to COVID-19,” said Lillian Mworeko of the International community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa. “Unreasonable movement restrictions on people who have urgent health needs is a clear violation of our rights.”

Civil society called for the following further provisions to be announced immediately by the COVID-19 Task Force:

- Remove the transport ban for all other people who are sick and/or have urgent health needs (such as HIV or TB treatment refills);
- Launch an emergency mobile health service system, wherein two (2) emergency vehicles, fully equipped with fuel and drivers, stationed at each sub-County in all districts, are available to provide free, 24-hour ambulance services during the duration of this crisis. RDCs, DHOs and LCs will be required to communicate and prominently display the dispatch numbers so that residents can easily make use of this life-saving service.
- LC1s must be given the mandate and support to identify boda-bodas and vehicles that can be used to transport those in need of urgent care when sub-County ambulances are not readily available.
- Designate legal aid services as essential during this unprecedented period, so that fundamental human rights are not put further at risk, and
- Release immediately and drop any charges against all people who have been caught up in sweeps related to curfew violations or other alleged contraventions of the Presidential Directives, such as 19 LGBT Ugandans arrested March 29, or the [hundreds of other people arrested and detained from around the country](#) allegedly for defying presidential orders.

“Criminalized communities and others with no social safety net have been struggling to respond to shifting demands from the President,” said Richard Lusimbo of Sexual

Minorities Uganda (SMUG). “Brutality and arbitrary detention are never acceptable—in response to COVID-19 or during any other time.”

“The human rights violations that the COVID-19 response has generated must be promptly investigated, and those who have suffered must get access to justice,” said Primah Kwagala, of The Women’s Pro Bono Initiative. The Women’s Pro Bono Initiative, Health GAP and CEHURD, have created a database to document the health rights violations triggered as a result of Uganda’s COVID-19 response. They requested communities to immediately share their evidence, in order to ensure accountability.

STATEMENT ISSUED BY:

1. Action for Rural Women’s Empowerment (ARUWE)
2. Centre for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD)
3. Chapter Four Uganda
4. Coalition for Health Promotion and Social Development (HEPS-Uganda)
5. Health Global Access Project (Health GAP)
6. Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF)
7. International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS Eastern Africa (ICWEA)
8. Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG)
9. Uganda Key Populations Coalition (UKPC)
10. Women’s Pro Bono Initiative
11. Uganda Network Law, Ethics and HIV (UGANET)