

Press release
For immediate release

March 27th, 2015

Kampala-Uganda- the Centre for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD) has instituted a case in the High Court calling for its intervention to impede on-going violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms of patients subjected to seclusion at Butabika National Mental Referral Hospital.

We call upon the court to make declarations that human rights and freedoms such as the right to privacy, clean and healthy environment, liberty and freedom from cruel, in human degrading treatment or punishment are violated when patients are secluded in mental health facilities

Many patients in Butabika hospital have been subjected to solitary confinement. The patients are often man-handled, heavily sedated, undressed and dumped into seclusion rooms. These rooms have no beddings, toilets and have very tiny and elevated windows and ventilators. Patients are barely supervised by the medical staff.

Mental disorder must be of a certain severity in order to justify seclusion. Seclusion is not a form of treatment and should only be resorted to when there is immediate risk of harm to the individual and others. Even under seclusion, the patient ought to be monitored at intervals. The detention of the patient should not be prolonged.

The special rapporteur on freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman degrading treatment or punishment has declared that there can be no therapeutic justification of solitary confinement and prolonged restraint of persons with disabilities in psychiatric institutions. Both prolonged seclusion and restraint constitutes torture and ill-treatment. The imposition of solitary confinement of any duration on persons with disabilities is cruel, in-human or degrading.

“We do not lose our humanity when we become mentally ill or disabled. Mentally ill and/or Mentally disabled patients are as entitled to the respect, fulfilment and protection of their fundamental human rights and freedoms guaranteed by our constitution as any other human being in this country. The right to a clean and healthy environment, personal liberty, health, freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of mentally ill patients in seclusion should be protected at all times regardless of their disability”, Mr. Mulumba Moses, Executive Director CEHURD notes.

Mental disability should at no time whatsoever be a ground to infringe on internationally and constitutionally guaranteed rights of any individual. These violations have been prevailing at Butabika Hospital for a very long time yet the government and the hospital management have made no effort whatsoever to provide redress to the human rights violations.

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