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54TH SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
FOR THE 54TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) was founded in 1998 and is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Uganda (Uganda) for the 54th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

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Background

1. Uganda is a country located in east-central Africa and has a population of approximately 48.85 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 36.2% of the population identifying as Catholic, 29% as Anglican, 14.3% as Pentecostal/Evangelical, 13.2% as Muslim, 2% as Seventh-day Adventist, and 5.3% as other.²

2. Uganda's last review was held on January 27, 2022.³ As a result of the review, Uganda received 273 recommendations, 139 of which it accepted.⁴ While there were no recommendations regarding religious freedom, we are concerned about the persecution of Christians by radical groups. In its 2026 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Uganda as the 72nd worst country for Christians to live in.⁵ This ranking stems from the fact that Christians have been targeted, attacked, and killed because of their faith.⁶ Since the last UPR cycle, violence against Christians in Uganda has increased exponentially. This includes violence against Christian converts and violence committed by radical Muslim extremist groups like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

3. In our last report, we discussed the problem of female genital mutilation (FGM) and the harmful impact it has on young girls and women. During Uganda's last review, it was recommended by Chile, and supported by Uganda, that the government "[a]dvance the elimination of all harmful traditional practices and stereotypes, including female genital mutilation" (125.245).⁷ Since its last review, Uganda has made significant progress in reducing the rates of FGM in the country.

4. In our last report, we also discuss the progress that Uganda has made in order to combat human trafficking. On the issue of human trafficking, it was recommended by Qatar, and supported by Uganda, that the government "[c]ontinue efforts to eliminate trafficking in persons" (125.125).⁸ Since its last review, Uganda has strengthened its ability to combat human trafficking and provide aid and resources for victims of human trafficking.

Legal Framework

Religious Freedom

5. Under Article 29 of the Constitution of Uganda, "[e]very person shall have the right to . . . freedom to practise any religion and manifest such practice which shall include the right to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious body or organisation in a manner consistent with this Constitution[.]"⁹

6. Additionally, Uganda is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹⁰ Under Article 2 of the ICCPR:

1. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.¹¹

Female Genital Mutilation

7. Under Part II, paragraph 2 of The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, “[a] person who carries out female genital mutilation commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment not exceeding ten years.”¹²

8. Uganda is also a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which protects children from “physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation[.]”¹³

Human Trafficking

9. Under Part II of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act:

1) Any person who—

(a) recruits, transports, transfers, harbours or receives a person, by means of; threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation; or

(b) recruits, hires, maintains, confines, transports, transfers, harbours or receives a person or facilitates any of these acts through force or other forms of coercion for the purpose of engaging that person in prostitution, pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, involuntary servitude, death bondage, forced or arranged marriage,

commits an offence and is liable, on conviction, to imprisonment for a term of fifteen years.¹⁴

10. Further, under Article 8 of the ICCPR, “[n]o one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”¹⁵ Uganda is also a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹⁶ Under Article 9, section 1 of this Protocol:

1. States Parties shall establish comprehensive policies, programmes and other measures:

(a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and

(b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.¹⁷

Religious Persecution

Societal Violence Perpetrated Against Christians

11. Despite constitutional protections guaranteeing freedom of religion, Christians in parts of Uganda face significant persecution. These incidents are particularly prevalent in predominantly Muslim communities in eastern Uganda, where social pressure, family hostility, and violence frequently prevent Christians from freely practicing their religion. Christians, especially converts from Islam, are subjected to intimidation, physical attacks, destruction of property, and even death because of their faith.

12. Even though Christians make up a majority of the population in Uganda, there are regions where Muslims represent the majority. In these regions, religious persecutions of Christians is a serious concern. The following examples are evidence of this problem.

13. On January 30, 2026, a pastor and assistant pastor were beaten by Muslim men after conducting an all-night prayer meeting in eastern Uganda.¹⁸

14. On December 21, 2025, Pastor Joseph Kanooni was assaulted by five Muslim men while preparing his church for a prayer gathering.¹⁹

15. On December 12, 2025, an evangelist was killed by Muslim assailants while traveling by motorcycle following a church event. The Muslim assailants attacked him because several Muslims had converted to Christianity at the event.²⁰

16. In at least one instance, extremist Muslims attacked a group of Christians. On November 4, 2025, extremist Muslims attacked Christians in Yumbe, killing five and injuring forty-four. During the attack, several Christian-owned homes and businesses were attacked and churches were vandalized.²¹

17. On October 13, 2024, Pastor Weere Mukisa was targeted after he converted three Muslims to Christianity. A Muslim mob set fire to his home in Namutumba District, and tragically, Pastor Mukisa, his wife, and their two daughters were killed.²²

18. On June 22, 2023, suspected Muslim extremists armed with machetes attacked worshippers during an overnight prayer meeting in Kakumiro District, killing one and injuring several others.²³

Persecution of Christian Converts

19. In addition to being attacked by Muslim extremists, Christian converts from Islam are at risk of severe persecution from their own families. In many cases, conversion from Islam to Christianity is viewed as a betrayal of one's religious and ethnic identity which may lead to serious harm.

20. For example, on May 8, 2026, a Christian man had his hands cut off by a Muslim relative after they learned that he had converted to Christianity.²⁴ In another case on March 11, 2026, a Muslim brutally attacked his wife during a Bible study in Bugiri District after he learned that she had converted to Christianity. She received numerous injuries, including a fractured hand and suspected spinal cord damage.²⁵ At the time this report was drafted,

authorities have yet to make an arrest in the case.²⁶ In March 2026, a Muslim man in Iganga District killed his son after he learned that his son had converted to Christianity.²⁷ Police have yet to investigate this case.²⁸ On October 13, 2025, a Muslim man attacked his wife and two children because they were embracing Christianity. After the attack, he organized a mob to destroy a church that the wife and children had been attending.²⁹ On September 1, 2025, a Muslim high school student killed his brother, who was a Christian.³⁰ Thankfully, in this case, the police arrested the student and charged him with murder.³¹ On March 16, 2025, a Christian couple and a recent Christian convert were killed after being poisoned by the convert's mother.³² On October 9, 2024, a Christian convert suffered severe injuries after her husband beat her and poured battery acid on her.³³

Violence Perpetrated by Muslim Extremists

21. Christians are also at risk of being targeted by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamic militant group. For example, in December 2023, suspected ADF militants killed three people in Western Uganda on Christmas. This attack was one week after ADF militants carried out another attack in the same city, killing ten people and destroying property.³⁴

22. In October 2023, ADF-associated terrorists murdered three Christian tourists.³⁵

23. That same year, the ADF attacked a boarding school, killing thirty-seven students and four others. During the attack the militants entered the dorms, set it on fire, and used machetes to harm and kill the students.³⁶

24. To combat ADF in the region, Uganda has initiated Operation Shujaat in partnership with the Democratic Republic of Congo. The objective of Operation Shujaat is to eliminate the ADF.³⁷

Thankfully, this operation is showing signs of success. In 2025, General Kainerugaba stated that “[w]e have severely degraded ADF, killed a lot of their commanders, and many terrorists have been killed because of the operation[.]”³⁸ In 2026, the Uganda People's Defence Force and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reaffirmed their commitment to the operation and eliminating the ADF.³⁹

25. The highlighted incidents above demonstrate that the religious protection set forth in Uganda's Constitution is not being honored. Many Christians, especially converts from Islam and believers living in predominantly Muslim areas, continue to be violently attacked and murdered. Violence by Muslim extremists, attacks by community members, and persecution within families continue to prevent Christians from freely exercising their Christian faith and raise concerns about the protection of the fundamental human right of freedom of religion.

Female Genital Mutilation

26. In our last report on Uganda, we recommended that Uganda work toward ending the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) and work to spread awareness on the dangers of FGM. Chile also recommended that Uganda work toward eliminating the harmful practice. Thankfully, Uganda has taken steps to stop the practice of FGM.

27. FGM rates have declined from 4.2% in 2016 to just 0.02% in 2026.⁴⁰ According to the State Minister for Gender and Culture, this reduction can be attributed to the government's investment in community outreach and greater enforcement of the law banning this practice.⁴¹

28. Further, Uganda is implementing its National Strategy to End Female Genital Mutilation by 2030. This strategy focuses on strengthening legal enforcement, increasing public awareness, and supporting communities in their efforts to stop FGM. The government has also expanded its prevention initiatives through the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative, which focuses on legal reforms, support services for survivors, data collection, and advocacy. Further, community-based initiatives have played a significant role in reducing rates of FGM in the country. Local governments, civil society organizations, and community leaders have implemented awareness campaigns to stop FGM.⁴²

Human Trafficking

29. In our last report, we also commended Uganda for the strides it made in combatting human trafficking. This included the creation of the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) which led to an increase in the number of victims identified and rescued. Thankfully, Uganda has continued efforts to combat human trafficking since its last review.

30. In the first year of the AHTU being created, authorities rescued 102 victims and apprehended eighty-one suspected human traffickers.⁴³ Now, since 2020, Uganda has identified 4,835 cases of human trafficking involving 7,581 victims.⁴⁴ The majority of cases involved sex trafficking and accounted for 2,844 of the identified cases.⁴⁵ Additionally, children were the primary target of human traffickers and accounted for 80% of the victims identified.⁴⁶ In June 2026, it was reported that police rescued thirty-seven children who were being trafficked under the false promises of providing education.⁴⁷

31. The government has also partnered with humanitarian organizations, like Okoa Refuge, to provide shelter to victims of human trafficking. Okoa Refuge alone operates five shelters and has provided services to thousands of victims. Okoa Refuge has also partnered with state attorney's office to care for victims, so that authorities are able to thoroughly investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking.⁴⁸

Recommendations

32. Uganda must strengthen protections for Christians by ensuring that acts of violence being carried out against Christians are investigated and prosecuted in a timely manner. This is critical in ensuring that Uganda is able to project religious freedom for all its citizens.

33. Further, to protect Christians, particularly Christian converts, from societal abuse, harassment, and violence, we ask that Uganda expand government-supported interfaith education and community programs — including through partnerships with civil-society bodies such as the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda — to promote tolerance, peaceful co-existence and respect for freedom of religion or belief, and to end religious violence.

34. Additionally, Uganda must strengthen civilian protection measures in areas vulnerable to attacks by the ADF by deploying permanent security forces in areas that are frequently targeted. Authorities should also establish alert systems to notify people of potential ADF attacks. Additionally, the government should provide security training for schools that are particularly vulnerable to attacks and investigate the gaps that exist in protecting civilians from attacks.

35. Additionally, while Uganda's efforts to combat the ADF have led to improved security, sustained action is needed to ensure that all Ugandans can practice their faith without fear of being targeted and killed.

36. Uganda's efforts to eradicate FGM are commendable, as demonstrated through its reduction in rates over the last decade. We want to encourage Uganda to continue implementing the same measures. It is our hope, that Uganda will be successful in its efforts to fully eradicate FGM by 2030.

37. We commend Uganda's continued efforts to combat human trafficking by increasing the number of identified human trafficking victims. We urge Uganda to continue to strengthen its capacity to combat human trafficking by increasing support for victims and working with organizations like Okoa Refuge.

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² *Id.*

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⁹ CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA Oct. 8, 1995, art. 29 § 1, <https://ulii.org/en/akn/ug/act/statute/1995/constitution/eng@2023-12-31>.

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¹³ Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 19 § 1, *adopted* Nov. 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

¹⁴ The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, Act No. 27/2023 (Uganda), https://media.ulii.org/media/legislation/115538/source_file/0372ab3f48185e54/2009-7.pdf.

¹⁵ ICCPR art. 8 §§ 1-2.

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