

Support the realisation of Cultural Rights for all Ugandans!

Cultural rights in Uganda are rarely valued, yet they are as important as any other human rights and they are provided for under national and international law.

Cultural rights aim at ensuring the enjoyment of culture and its components, in conditions of equality, human dignity and non-discrimination, and include the rights to access, express and enjoy one's culture with the support (and without interference) from the State.

Our cultural rights are poorly respected. For instance:

- Fellow citizens are often disregarded because they belong to a minority or belittled group. The Ik in Uganda are thus known by their neighbours (and described in the Uganda Constitution) as the Teuso (meaning poor people).
- Cultural domination leads to conflicts and the failure to address systematic discrimination and injustices. The poor recognition of Lusoga in Busoga and conflict in the Rwenzori region can for instance in part be ascribed to the unequal status claimed by different cultural groups, and lead to a feeling by some cultural communities that their cultural spaces are threatened.
- Denying cultural rights affects large numbers of people, for example, the Bakonzo, the Bagungu, the Benet and the Batwa who have been evicted from their land and cultural sites when they were turned into National Parks, forest reserves or oil production areas. This deprived them of their ancestral way of life, their dignity and their right to choose where to reside.

- The plight of indigenous minority groups is particularly severe: negative attitudes affect their right to express their culture; their languages and other elements of their rich and diverse heritage are on the verge of disappearing. Where they have been evicted and displaced from their ancestral land, this has resulted in a grave loss of their tangible and intangible heritage.
- When cultural rights are violated, so are other rights: it is often harder, for example, for individuals who cannot read and write or who are negatively stereotyped to find work, to take part in political activity or to exercise their freedom of expression.
- Government gives scant attention to the cultural sector and to the need to nurture our cultural resources, in spite of their recognised importance for sustainable development. Historical buildings are not protected, cultural sites are desecrated, the National Culture Policy is hardly implemented. Uganda is alone in the region not to have a Ministry of Culture!

As Ugandans, we therefore seek:

- The right to exercise our cultural practices; to access culturally-relevant education; to freely transmit information on one's cultural heritage for both present and future generations; and the right to access goods and services, sites and spaces of cultural and historical significance.
- The freedom to express our cultural identity (alone or in community with others) and to communicate how we wish to be recognised, so as to have one's culture respected.

The freedom to express oneself in public or in private in a language of one's choice is an important aspect of cultural rights, as well as the holistic enjoyment of - and participation in - cultural life of our choice, as individuals and as communities, without discrimination.

- A recognition by Government of the importance of culture for sustainable and dignified development: Uganda needs a substantive and well-resourced Ministry of Culture, with at least 1% of the national budget for the culture sector (up from the current 0.003%!). The National Culture Policy needs review and implementation.
- Affirmative action for our indigenous minority groups, to safeguard their dignity, their languages, and other aspects of their heritage, as well as to promote their political voice. Where they have been evicted and displaced from their ancestral land, this must be urgently tackled in a respectful, just and consistent way.

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Years!