



Zambia Free Press Initiative (ZFPI) statement on the Ugandan government's internet shutdown and continued detention of human rights activist and lawyer Sarah Birete

Lusaka, January 13, 2026 - The Zambia Free Press Initiative has condemned the Uganda government's decision to shut down the internet ahead of the January 15 election. This move violates basic rights, including freedom of expression and access to information, and undermines media freedom.

In a civilized democracy, cutting off internet access can never be an option as it limits people's ability to communicate and stay informed, and it puts journalists at risk as they try to do their work. During elections, access to information is essential, not a threat.

The FPI calls on the Ugandan government to respect fundamental rights, restore internet access, and ensure the safety of journalists and media workers. Authorities must act responsibly and guard against abuses of power, especially during sensitive times. We stand with journalists and the people of Uganda and reaffirm our commitment to defending media freedom and digital rights across the region.

Additionally, the FPI condemns the continued pre-trial detention of Dr. Sarah Bireete, a prominent human rights defender, following her arbitrary arrest on December 30, 2025, on charges of obtaining or disclosing personal data in line with the Data Protection laws.

On January 2, 2026, Birete appeared in court, where her lawyers applied for bail, but hearing of the application was adjourned to January 21, 2026 to allow a response from the prosecutor. This decision by the court is despite the law requiring an immediate determination of bail applications by the accused. Her continued detention has raised serious concerns about due process of the law during the country's crucial elections. We call on the Ugandan government to immediately release Birete and drop all charges against her.

Issued by:

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