

## PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

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### **Uganda: Court dismisses case against prominent human rights defender Gerald Kankya**

**Paris-Geneva, May 27, 2015 – *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights defenders (a joint programme of FIDH and the World Organisation against Torture – OMCT), welcomes the decision of Fort Portal's Magistrates Court to dismiss the case against human rights defender Gerald Kankya and urges authorities to stop harassing human rights defenders in Uganda.***

Following the failure by the prosecution to produce any complainant or witnesses despite six hearings, on May 20, 2015 the Magistrates Court of Fort Portal dismissed the case against Mr. Kankya, prosecuted under charges of “simple assault”. Arrested on March 24, 2015 and afterwards released on bail, Mr. Kankya was being accused of assaulting a journalist<sup>1</sup>.

Executive Director of the Twerwaneho Listeners Club (TLC), since 2006 Mr. Kankya has been working to combat unlawful evictions from public community land. TLC broadcasts weekly programs on human rights education, performs capacity building to enhance the ability of human rights defenders to carry out their activities in the region, provides civic education, monitors and documents human rights violations, and challenges unlawful governmental actions in court.

Lately, TLC has been running a petition campaign to the President Mr. Yoweri Museveni against the Queen Mother Best Kemigisa Nursery, Primary and Vocational School, a private commercial project developed on land grabbed from illegal expropriations. In 2012, Mr. Gerald Kankya received the European Union Human Rights Defender Award in Uganda.

Although the Observatory welcomes the decision taken by the Magistrates Court, it remains concerned as Mr. Kankya and his colleagues at TLC are still the target of a judicial harassment aiming at preventing them from pursuing their human rights activities.

Indeed, in a separate case, on January 23, 2015, Messrs. Gerald Kankya and Simon Amanyire were assaulted by approximately 30 men wearing Queen Mother Best Kemigisa Nursery, Primary and Vocational Schools traffic reflectors jackets, armed with clubs and allegedly commanded by the District Police commander Mr. Geoffrey Kahebwa and another police officer. Despite Mr. Kankya's grievous harm, medically ascertained, the police refused to record his complaint. In relation to this incident, Mr. Kankya is being prosecuted for “grave assault”.

On May 27, 2015, the scheduled trial was adjourned, as the police file was missing. The next hearing is scheduled on June 24, 2015.

The Observatory urges Ugandan authorities to stop harassing Mr. Gerald Kankya and all TLC members, as well as all human rights defenders in Uganda.

*The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and OMCT. The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy to situations of repression against human rights defender.*

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<sup>1</sup> See Urgent Appeal of the Observatory UGA 001 / 0315 / OBS 024, of March 26, 2015.