



CIVIC REASON

AND

PUBLIC ORDER

MANAGEMENT

SECURING SPACES FOR CIVIC REASON

**SOURCE**

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# CIVIC REASON AND PUBLIC ORDER MANAGEMENT

SECURING SPACES FOR CIVIC REASON

## CONTEXT & BACKGROUND:

### WHICH ISSUE IS BEING ADDRESSED?

The Human Rights Network Uganda (HURINET-U) is a network of human rights organisations. Some of the issues on which they focus include political pluralism, public order management and the transition to multi-party democracy in Uganda. *“The public space in Uganda appears to be a protected and patronised space. Either it is utilised in favour of the regime, or not utilised at all. Uganda has experienced a heavy clamp down on public demonstrations, rallies and meetings organised by the political opposition, cultural leaders and institutions. How could the different elements within society be enabled to take advantage of public space in order to undertake civic action and exercise civic expression without necessarily turning violent? We concern ourselves with this issue.”*

### STRATEGY AND ACTIVITIES: HOW ARE YOU TRYING TO CHANGE THIS SITUATION?

HURINET-U advocates police accountability and a reform of the security sector. *“In colonial times, the police were meant to protect the colonial master. Uganda’s political history since decolonisation has been turbulent, leaving no room for the transformation of the police and military forces. Some thought that it would be possible for all to subscribe to a unitary way of thinking. The Movement system is one such example. This changed after the referendum for multi-party democracy, but the way of thinking, the legal framework and the institutions have yet to change. The police, for instance, have continued to interpret their mandate to protect the regime rather than to provide security for the state and the citizens. That is why political activists who seek to make use of public space are heavily suppressed; they are seen as a threat to the regime, and the regime is interpreted as the equivalent of the state.”*

HURINET-U developed a program to build the capacity of the police and other institutions which provide security at public events, rallies and demonstrations. The

program aims to cause a shift in the mindset of the different actors and institutions in the security sector in terms of their roles and responsibilities.

The program also focuses on a reconstitution of the legal order so that the rights to assemble and demonstrate are recognised and protected. HURINET-U audits legal policy and programmes with a focus on the management of diversity and pluralism in the public space. *“One of our recommendations is to put those guidelines into effect which have been generated by civil society and the human rights commission, and which support the participation of various actors within public space. These guidelines describe responsibilities and roles for the organisers, participants, and the police, but lack the necessary implementation of the law in order to help create order and simultaneously protect the right to participate in public space.”*

#### SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES: WHAT HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ALONG THE WAY?

In a politically sensitive climate, and with growing tensions between different groups, it will be challenging for the police and security forces to transform their role in their management of public order. *“But we try to insist that it is unnecessary for the state to deny the right to participate in public space out of fear of violence. History has shown that such spaces have only turned violent when the police and security forces intervened.”*

#### CIVIC REASON: IN WHAT WAYS COULD THIS EXAMPLE BE RELATED TO CIVIC REASON?

*“Freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly are some of the forms in which people manifest and express themselves regarding different issues, cultural or political, religious or otherwise. They are fundamental aspects of civic expression in the public space.”* Safety is a precondition for citizens to manifest and express themselves in public processes of civic reason.

HURINET-U argues that it is the role of the state to facilitate safe civic expression and public dialogue when dealing with differences. The police can protect the safety of citizens and organisations when these express themselves publicly. In addition to adequate legislation, the state requires legitimate institutions, such as the police force, which are capable of ensuring favourable conditions under which civic reason can flourish within public space. HURINET aims to help the police, rethink their primary objectives and develop new skills to protect certain social freedoms.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What do you think the role of the police should be in a democratic state? Do you believe that CSOs should play a role in making the police force a relevant, professional and democratically accountable institution? If you agree, please explain how the role of the CSO would play itself out.
- HURINET-U tried to create public awareness through radio talk-shows. These served as platforms through which members of the public could phone in and express their views on how the police could be reformed. What do you think of this strategy? How do you see the role of the media as a platform for civic reason?

