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September 5, 2015

The Honorable Chairwoman Namugwanya Benny Bugembe
P.O. Box 93
Mubende, Uganda
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chair.defence@parliament.go.ug

Members of the Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs
comm.defence@parliament.go.ug

Dear Chairwoman Bugembe and Committee Members:

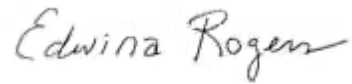
We at the Secular Policy Institute, together with the below signed organizations, would like to express our concerns about the proposed Ugandan Non-Governmental Organizations Act, 2015. It has been brought to our attention that the new law may potentially impede the operations of many bona fide organizations in Uganda.

Ugandan history over the last three decades shows your country's steadfast commitment to democracy and democratic ideals. Uganda successfully awarded representation to marginalized groups by universal suffrage under the Movement System of government. The return to the multi-party politics in mid-2000s nonetheless ensured that all voices have equal right to be heard. It would be most pleasing to see that such status quo is upheld for years to come.

We fear, however, that the proposed Non-Governmental Organizations Act 2015, might create avenues to arbitrarily suppress organizations which represent unpopular viewpoints. While we agree with the stated premise of the bill to mend gaps in existing law, and curtail any possibly "subversive methods and activities" of some NGOs, we also recognize possibilities for corruption of the bill. The proposed new law calls for creation of a National Board for Non-Governmental Organizations which would not only register and issue guidelines for non-governmental organizations, but monitor all aspects of their activities. The Act also introduces some redundant requirements, for example the obligation for organizations to re-register following the enactment of the new bill. Furthermore, the Act contains wording which allows for certain discretionary decision-making on the part of officers of the Board. This may lead to abuses of the law, as well as potential targeting and disabling of particular organizations.

There has been vocal critique of the Non-Governmental Organizations Act 2015, coming from various organizations in Uganda. Thus, we call for a review of the Act jointly with those who offer criticism. With multilateral input, a new bill may both rectify existing law, and truly foster fair and equal treatment of all non-governmental organizations in Uganda.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edwina Rogers".

Edwina Rogers, CEO
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