

Museveni accuses foreign countries over internal affairs interference

13 September 2018

Background

On 09 September 2018, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni accused foreign countries of interfering in Ugandan internal affairs with accusations that they are channelling money to opposition parties through Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). In a state of the nation address, Museveni said CSOs funded by foreign countries are giving opposition parties funding and advice so that they can “lie” about the government on their behalf, a move he said will lead to “mistakes”. President Museveni has said there is a need to amend the Sovereign Act to prevent foreign citizens from interfering with Ugandan politics, but at this stage this statement is more political rhetoric than a planned government proposal.

President Museveni’s address comes after protests in Kampala over the arrest and alleged torture of Kyadondo East MP Robert Kyagulanyi (famously known as Bobi Wine) in Arua, northern Uganda. Just hours after President Museveni’s speech on 09 September 2018, Uganda deported an American aid worker named Jacqueline Wolfson over accusations of using her NGO to fund Bobi Wine and his People Power Movement. Human rights lawyers defending Ms. Wolfson have denied the claims made against her Shule Foundation NGO and are seeking compensation from Ugandan authorities.

The alleged torture of Bobi Wine by security forces has led to the European Union (EU) delegation and the United States of America (USA) embassy in Kampala condemning the government for a deterioration of democratic principles and the violations of human rights. The US embassy said individuals who were detained by police had the “right to treatment, due process, access to lawyers and to their families, and a prompt, fair and transparent trial” and that all who are in need of medical treatment such as Bobi Wine should be granted opportunity to meet doctors of their choices.

In another major development in Uganda, unknown assailants in the outskirts of Kampala shot senior police officer Muhammad Kirumira and his wife on the evening of 08 September 2018. Mr. Kirumira had previously criticised the government for mismanaging the police force but thus far there is no evidence that this is a state-sanctioned assassination.

Assessment:

- It is highly likely that Ugandan security forces will continue to arrest opposition politicians amid the threat of protests. Considering opposition calls for change, the government is likely to become more authoritarian in its attempts to retain power.
- Recent violent protests and assassinations may factor in as a security concern for businesses operating in Uganda. Companies that export goods to South Sudan and the DRC may require greater security in transportation as the Arua District is a key supply route between these three states. Additional private security to investors property will help minimise potential risks that might be caused by protesters.
- Following President Museveni’s accusations against CSO’s, it is possible that the government will launch an audit campaign under the auspices of curbing foreign influence, to prevent CSO’s from criticising government authorities.
- Businesses in Uganda may benefit from an awareness of areas likely to experience violent protests and large inflows of refugees such as the Arua District. If violence in the neighbouring DRC continues after the planned December 2018 elections, it is likely to bring greater instability to the Arua District. With momentum for opposition protests building, other areas in Uganda could hold similar demonstrations against the government.

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