

# Uganda: Authorities must lift social media block that violates human rights



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Shutdown a violation of the right to freedom of expression and access to information

Uganda has blocked access to social media platforms in attempts to “silence” government critics ahead of the country’s elections, Amnesty said today.

On 9 January, Facebook shut down dozens they were “fake and duplicate accounts” and on 12 January, Uganda’s President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, accused Facebook and others of interfering with the electoral process.

On the same day, the Uganda Communications Commission’s Executive Director Irene Sewankambo ordered telecommunications companies to “immediately suspend any access and use” of social media and online messaging platforms for the public. Service providers such as Airtel and MTN Uganda have already written to their subscribers announcing the suspension.

Sarah Jackson, Amnesty International’s Deputy Regional Director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes, said:

“Amid concerns over threatening rhetoric from high-ranking government officials, use of violence and an escalating crackdown on political opposition - it is alarming that the Ugandan authorities have suspended social media networks.

“The move is clearly intended to silence the few accredited election observers, opposition politicians, human rights defenders, activists, journalists and bloggers who are

monitoring the elections.

“Such shutdowns are a violation of the right to freedom of expression and access to information. Ugandan authorities must immediately lift all blanket restrictions and end their wave of political repression ahead of the general election.”

Social media shutdowns have happened in previous Ugandan elections. In 2011, service providers temporarily block access to Facebook and Twitter for 24 hours and in 2016, authorities ordered telecommunication companies to block social media access on mobile phones.

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