

The guidelines outline dos and don'ts for parents, political parties, schools, and the general public, emphasising strict adherence to laws that prohibit the use of children in any form of political activity.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

The Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) has issued a raft of guidelines aimed at shielding children from exploitation and harm during the 2026 election season.

The Commission cautioned that the growing involvement of minors in rallies and campaign activities amounts to child abuse and violates national laws. It stressed that safeguarding children must take precedence as political activity intensifies across the country.

Mr Lamex Omara Apita, a commissioner who represented the Commission chairperson, Ms Mariam Wangadya, told journalists in Kampala yesterday that the Commission has documented rising cases of children being drawn into political activities that expose them to physical, emotional, and psychological risks.

"Videos have been circulating and cases have been reported to us of children putting up or pulling down posters, seen on candidates' trails chanting slogans, and appearing in political content, yet these are people under 18 and not eligible to vote," Mr Apita noted.

He added: "Children have no place in campaign spaces. Elections cannot come at the expense of their safety and dignity."

The guidelines, developed jointly with the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN), outline dos and don'ts for parents, political parties, schools, and the general public, emphasising strict adherence to laws that prohibit the use of children in any form of political activity.

On November 10, during President Museveni's campaign rallies in Mbale and Bukwo districts in eastern Uganda, viral videos circulated on social media showing students reportedly brought from various schools, all clad in yellow party T-shirts. In the footage, some of the students were heard lamenting that they had spent the entire day at the rally without food.

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with nearly half of the population of 45.9 million under 17 years of age, according to the 2024 Uganda Bureau of Statistics census report. The report said 22.7 million people are below 18 years.

The Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) Executive Director, Mr Damon Wamara, said past elections have shown that children often face heightened risks during campaign seasons, including exposure to violence, manipulation, and abandonment at

22.7m
UNDER 18 YEARS
IN UGANDA

Rights body to protect children from exploitation in elections



Mr Omala Apita (centre); Mr Robin Nandy Unicef representative (second right); and other members of the Uganda Human Rights Commission during a press conference in Kampala yesterday. PHOTO/ GEOFREY MUTUMBA

campaign venues.

"We have seen them used as campaign agents. They do not know what they are doing but are paid to move around spreading messages, which makes them targets, although it is good that they begin to practice their democratic rights of being aware of the participation role," Mr Wamara said.

He added that election-related handouts, including alcohol and money, often contribute to gender-based violence, which in turn fuels child abuse.

"We ask political parties to consider the child as a priority in all activities. Put the best interest of the child before everything else. We have seen children who are taken from the villages to the campaigning grounds, and then afterwards they're abandoned there, stuck, and the family has to look for how to transport them back to their villages, hence their livelihood is put at risk," the UCRNN boss said.

The Unicef Country Representative, Dr Robin Nandy, emphasised that efforts to safeguard children during elections must focus on the most vulnerable groups, including refugee children, girls, children with disabilities, and those living in poor or insecure communities.

"We cannot address these issues through generalisation. In every community, we need to identify and target the most vulnerable. It is a collective responsibility of the government, parents, and communities to safeguard children's rights during the election," Dr Nandy said.

UHRC announced that the guidelines will be disseminated widely through community structures and campaign monitoring teams as the country enters the peak of political activity ahead of the 2026 General Election.



Children's safety.

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- Lamex Omara Apita, who represented the UHRC Commission chairperson

DOS

The UHRC guidelines ask stakeholders to do the following during election seasons:

1. Monitor children's whereabouts for their safety at home or at school during campaigns.
2. Supervise your children's online activity and teach them to recognise hateful or misleading political messages.
3. Children should report anyone who asks them to perform or join rallies to a trusted adult.
4. Focus campaigns on issues that affect children's wellbeing and include child rights in party policies.
5. Follow the international, regional, and national laws that protect the rights of children.
6. Keep schools open every time they are supposed to be and avoid scheduling rallies that force them out of class.
7. Politicians should train their campaign staff on children's rights and election laws.
8. Use calm language and promote unity. Remember that children listen and learn from adults.