



PRESS RELEASE

December 31, 2025

WAEON Condemns the Arrest of Dr. Sarah Bireete and Calls for Respect for Human Rights and Democratic Freedoms

The attention of the West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) has been drawn to the arrest and detention of Dr. Sarah Bireete, the Director for the Center for Constitutional Governance, a regional watchdog based in Kampala, Uganda, that strengthens constitutional governance by bridging the critical gap between what the law promises (policy) and what actually happens on the ground (practice).

Dr. Bireete currently serves as the Chairperson of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), a global non-partisan network that unites domestic election observer groups and upholds the principle that democratic legitimacy is derived from the freely expressed will of the people through credible elections, of which WAEON is a member organization.

Publicly available information shows that Dr. Sarah Bireete was reportedly arrested on 30th December 2025 and is presently being held at Natete Police Station. Although the Uganda Police Force has publicly acknowledged the arrest through its official X (formerly Twitter) handle, WAEON notes that, to date, no formal charges have been communicated to Dr. Bireete or her legal representatives. WAEON respectfully recalls that Article 23(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda provides that any person who is arrested or detained must be promptly informed, in a language they understand, of the reasons for their arrest, as well as of their right to legal counsel of their choice. Observance of these constitutional guarantees is essential to due process and to sustaining public confidence in Uganda's Justice system. WAEON further reaffirms the importance of the rule of law, including the presumption of innocence under Article 28(3) and the right to a fair, expeditious, and public hearing before an independent and impartial court, as guaranteed under Articles 28(1) and 28(2) of the Constitution of Uganda. Upholding these principles remains fundamental to democratic governance and the protection of civic space.

WAEON emphasizes that Uganda is bound by a range of international and regional human rights and governance obligations. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every individual is entitled to protection against arbitrary arrest or detention, the right to a fair and public hearing, and the presumption of innocence, principles that are central to the rule of law. At the continental level, Uganda's ratification of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights obliges the State to uphold the right to liberty and security of the person for no one to be arbitrarily arrested or detained (Article 6), ensure that every individual's cause is heard by an impartial tribunal (Article 7), and guarantee respect for human rights without discrimination.

These standards are complemented by Uganda's commitments under the East African Community Treaty (Articles 6(d) and 7(2)), which require Partner States to advance democratic governance, respect human rights, uphold the rule of law, and exercise state authority with accountability. Adherence to these legal and normative frameworks is critical to



protecting civic space, safeguarding constitutional governance, and maintaining public confidence in democratic institutions, particularly during periods of heightened political activity.

WAEON therefore calls on the government of Uganda to:

1. Immediately clarify the legal basis for Dr. Bireete's arrest and detention, including the specific charges, and also ensure all processes follow Uganda's constitutional protections and international human rights standards.
2. Ensure respect for fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and civic participation during the electoral processes.
3. Ensure that Dr. Bireete's rights to legal counsel, humane treatment in custody, a fair and prompt hearing before an independent court, and transparency are respected throughout any judicial process.

WAEON reaffirms its commitment to democratic principles, the rule of law, and the protection of civic space across Africa. Arbitrary arrests and detentions of human rights defenders and election observers undermine public trust, impede democratic participation, and jeopardize the integrity of electoral processes.

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Signed

Rev. James Lahai,
Chairman, WAEON

About WAEON

The West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) is a non-profit organization that is impartial, non-partisan, and non-religious, with a mission to promote and improve Citizens' Election Observation Groups (CEOGs) throughout the West African subregion. WAEON subscribes to the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations. WAEON is made up of independent and nonpartisan CEOGs throughout West Africa. Since its founding in 2010, the network has worked to support member organizations morally and technically as they perform impartial citizen election observation, advocate for electoral reform, and support legitimate elections in their home nations.

For more information, please contact:

Joseph Oti Frimpong

Project Coordinator

Telephone: +233 241986067

Email: j.frimpong@cddgh.org