

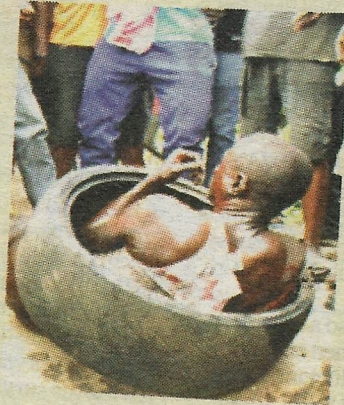
LETTER OF THE DAY

Build strong rule of law to end mob justice in Uganda

I was shocked when I read a story, 'Mob kills 42 in 7 weeks', in the *Daily Monitor* of March 6. The story stated that this means on average, six people are killed every single week. The numbers from the Criminal Investigations Directorate are alarming, but not surprising. Cases linger in court for years. Police often do not have the resources to apprehend or transport suspects. Criminals are released and their cases are never followed up. Corruption is rampant at all levels of the justice system. It is no wonder that many Ugandans feel like they have to take justice into their own hands.

That said, I do not believe in mob action. Actually, calling it "justice" is an affront to justice. It should be referred to as mob injustice. Of the six people killed every single week, what are the chances that all of them were guilty of the offences they were suspected to have committed? And even if they were guilty, did their crimes warrant their brutal killing?

Last year, at the height of killings in Masaka and the surrounding areas, people received letters threatening them with violence; people's houses were broken into; many homes were being robbed and in some instances, women sexually abused. In all this craziness, a strange and sad thing happened. My



uncle was killed. My uncle was then staying with my grandmother (his mother), in Masaka.

Growing up, he had stayed with us for a while and during that time, we learnt that he had mental health challenges. He sometimes had moments where he was not lucid and would disappear from home for days or weeks on end and would later come back. Sometimes, he would be found wandering about with no idea of where he was. Even in that state, my uncle wouldn't hurt a fly. At that time in Masaka, my uncle suffered one of the episodes and disappeared from home. My grandmother was used to these moments, but she was still

worried considering the insecurity in the area. She continued looking for him in vain. Days later, she was told to go and pick the body of my uncle, who had been killed. As he wandered around on one of those nights, he encountered a group of people, who surrounded him and accused him of being one of the thugs terrorising residents.

In his mental state, he attempted to run away and this made his captors to construe it as a sign of guilt. They caught, and beat him up, as his pleas of innocent fell on deaf ears. After he was in near comma, they carried and dumped him at a police station from where he died moments later. My grandmother was inconsolable. We never really got to know who was involved and none of the family really wanted to go through the trauma of trying to find out who the perpetrators of his battering were. We quietly picked up his body and said our farewells to him.

Mob injustice is carried out because many Ugandans believe that the due process is an impediment to true justice. Mob action is illegal. Let us build and strengthen our justice system to deliver fair justice to all. Everyone is innocent until proven guilty by a court of law.
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