

GOVT ISSUES TOUGH ELECTION COVERAGE GUIDELINES

By Nelson Kiva

The Government has issued stringent guidelines to media houses and digital content creators, banning live streaming of unofficial election results.

The Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) and National Guidance Ministry and the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) in a joint media briefing at Uganda Media Centre in Kampala yesterday, called for responsible media coverage of elections.

Aminah Zawedde, the ICT and national guidance ministry permanent secretary, said responsible reporting is not optional, but essential for peace, public order and national stability.

"Media platforms must not be abused to incite violence, spread falsehoods, or undermine the credibility of the electoral process. The misuse of both traditional and digital media by political actors or individuals in pursuit of narrow interests will not be tolerated," she said.

According to Zawedde, defiant media houses or digital content creators will be switched off, besides taking legal action against responsible

UCC SPEAKS OUT ON USING BITCHAT

Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) executive director Nyombi Thembo used the same platform to notify Ugandans, who are excited about the messaging application, BitChat, saying it is not beyond regulation.

In anticipation of the Government curtailing the Internet, some online crusaders including opposition activists are imploring their followers to embrace BitChat as a substitute communication platform.

Thembo disclosed that government holds methodical capacity to control

or deactivate BitChat if need arises, insisting that their team has the technical know-how to disable the application more than its advocates.

"We have the highest concentration of software engineers and developers in this country. Who can easily switch off such platforms if the need arises," Thembo said, before calling for responsible use of all social media platforms.

Thembo revealed that UCC has no problem with political parties having their own tally centres as long as there is no livestreaming of results.

mandate of the Electoral Commission (EC) and the broadcasting or sharing of unverified or premature results is illegal. Digital platforms are not exempt from the law. The Computer Misuse Act applies fully to online conduct, including the spread of false information and offensive communication. Freedom of expression must be exercised responsibly and within the framework of the law," Zawedde said.

Uganda is scheduled to go to polls on January 15. The EC has indicated that over 21 million registered voters are expected to cast ballots at 50,739 polling stations across the country.

Zawedde noted that UCC, working with relevant stakeholders, was actively monitoring broadcast and online media, stressing that any violations will be addressed in accordance with the law, including regulatory sanctions where necessary.

"As we move closer to the polling day, I

urge media owners, editors, journalists, digital publishers and the public to rely on verified information and official sources. I also call upon all citizens to act responsibly online and offline and to reject misinformation intended to cause fear or divisions," she said.

She added: "Our collective responsibility is to ensure that ICTs and the media contribute to peaceful, credible elections and national unity. Let us use these platforms in the service of truth, stability and the public good."

ON INTERNET SHUTDOWN

Zawedde expressed concern over rise in misinformation, particularly on digital platforms, citing the most persistent claims currently circulating that the Government intends to switch off the Internet during elections.

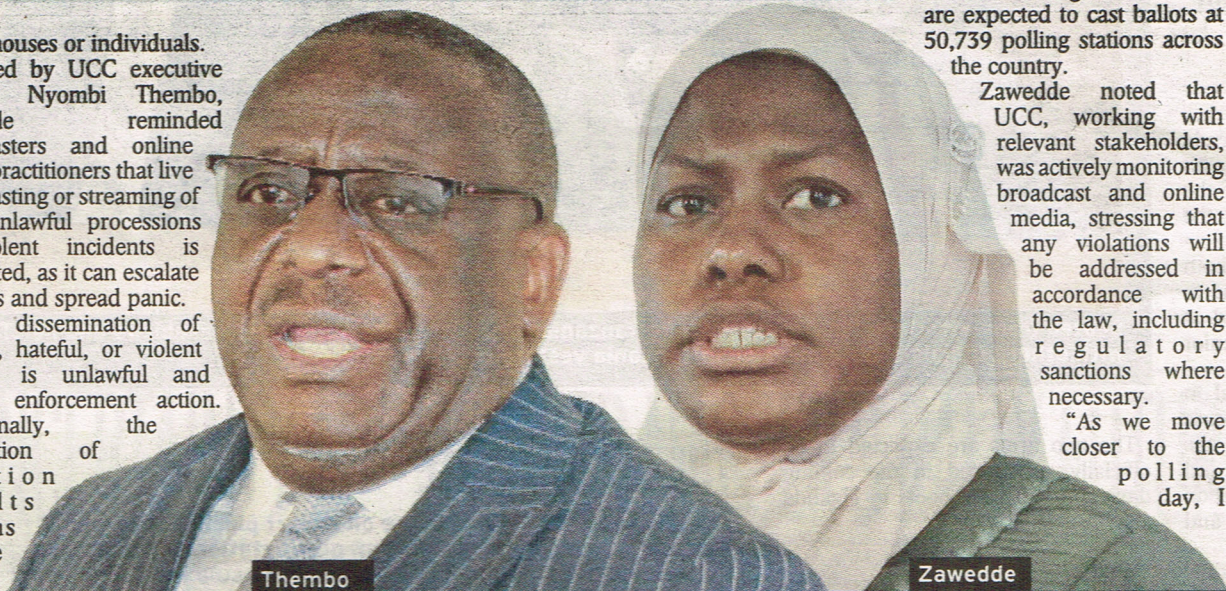
"The Government has not announced, directed, or implemented any decision to shut down the Internet during the election period. Claims suggesting otherwise are false and misleading," she said.

On his part, Thembo noted that elections are a serious matter and that faulting regulations can lead to problems.

media houses or individuals.

Flanked by UCC executive director Nyombi Thembo, Zawedde reminded broadcasters and online media practitioners that live broadcasting or streaming of riots, unlawful processions or violent incidents is prohibited, as it can escalate tensions and spread panic.

"The dissemination of inciting, hateful, or violent content is unlawful and attracts enforcement action. Additionally, the declaration of election results remains the sole



Thembo

Zawedde