

February 5, 2021

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Khaled Mohamed Khaled
We the Best Music Group
Via email

Dear Mr. Khaled,

According to an announcement on the MTV Africa website, you are scheduled to host the MTV Africa Music Awards (MAMAs), an event organized by MTV and the Government of Uganda, originally planned for February 20, 2021, but postponed on February 4 until further notice.

By accepting, you will be performing in an event sponsored by the brutal dictatorship of Yoweri Museveni, which will use your appearance to whitewash its image and distract from its most recent murderous repression, including the jailing and censorship of artists like the ones who will be featured at the MAMAs.

I am writing to urgently inform you of the human rights crisis in Uganda, and to respectfully request that you either cancel your participation, urge organizers to move the venue elsewhere, or use your voice, art, platform, and influence as a global entertainment icon to support Ugandans' courageous struggle for a country free of dictatorship, censorship, and repression.

Yoweri Museveni has been Uganda's dictator since seizing power through guerilla warfare in January 1986. In January 2020, Uganda's subservient Electoral Commission declared Museveni the winner of presidential elections in which he was seeking a sixth term. Museveni [called](#) the election "the most cheating-free" since independence from Britain in 1962. In fact, the elections were unfree and unfair by any measure, as they were held amidst a brutal crackdown against civil society and political opponents, and marred by fraud allegations.

The presidential campaign registered the worst political violence in Uganda in decades. Museveni's regime particularly cracked down on the campaigning of leading opposition candidate, Member of Parliament, and popular musician Bobi Wine. Wine, his campaign team, and supporters suffered multiple forms of intimidation, including restrictions of movement, repeated arrests, and beatings, deadly shootings, and excessive force at the hands of security forces, which routinely used live bullets and stun grenades.

The worst spike in violence came in November, when security forces shot dead [more than 50 people](#) while dispersing protests against Wine's arrest. About 3,000 opposition activists, demonstrators, and Wine supporters are [reported](#) to have been arrested or abducted by state security agents since then. In December, Wine was forced to [suspend](#) his campaigning, while UN human rights experts [expressed](#) serious concerns about regime violence ahead of the polls. One week before the election, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [condemned](#) the regime's discriminatory and opportunistic enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions to curtail opposition campaign activities.

Additionally, Museveni's regime did not allow international poll monitors to observe the elections, and on January 13 (election eve), the regime [ordered](#) the internet switched off, plunging the country into a complete internet and information blackout. On January 15, security forces surrounded Wine's residence, effectively placing the musician (whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi) under [house arrest](#) for the next 11 days.

Unlike most artists in democracies, artists in Uganda do not enjoy freedom of expression or artistic freedom, and face pressure to only praise the regime. Museveni's regime has jailed, prosecuted, or censored several artists over the years for daring to use their talent to speak up about injustices in Uganda. Wine's music, for instance, is currently banned from TV and radio, and he is not allowed to perform concerts in the country. Musician Nubian Li, a close associate of Wine, is currently [in jail](#) on trumped-up charges for allegedly possessing four rounds of ammunition. The authorities failed to conduct any credible investigations into the July 2019 abduction, torture, and death of musician [Ziggy Wine](#), a friend of Bobi Wine and an outspoken supporter of the People Power resistance movement.

Furthermore, Museveni's regime has for several years now sought to impose strict censorship regulations on artists and performers. For example, the 2019 Stage Plays and Public Entertainment Rules required artists to seek a permit and submit the content of any public performance for vetting by the government's Uganda Communication Council. Penalty for non-compliance carried a fine and/or a 6-month jail term. Officials withdrew the regulation in August 2020, only after protests from local artists, as well as global music icons, including Bono, Seun Kuti, and Peter Gabriel.

You are a public figure who has done a great deal of philanthropy in support of local communities through We The Best Foundation. But by participating in the MAMAs, you will be unintentionally helping to whitewash the public image of a brutal dictatorship that systematically represses freedom of expression and artistic freedom and has a well-documented record of brutalizing, beating, jailing, and murdering its citizens, particularly political opponents and peaceful protesters.

These should not be the values that align with your brand.

In the wake of the police killing of George Floyd, you generously committed to use your art, voice, and platform for justice. In line with this commitment, we urge you to use your platform to promote human rights in Uganda and contribute to a mission of protecting freedom globally, while the Ugandan government counts on using and manipulating your influence to bolster its reputation



and regain global credibility. Simply put: while maybe unbeknownst to you, your appearance will serve as propaganda for Museveni's 35-year-old dictatorship.

Considering the information above, HRF believes that your participation in a performance sponsored by a murderous, repressive regime involved in gross human rights violations — especially by the police — would be highly unfortunate and damaging to your brand. Furthermore, it would be disastrous for a public figure of your standing, who has articulated a commitment to democracy, prison reform, and social justice, to be placed in league with a repressive regime.

Instead, you could use your extensive following on social media to galvanize further support for artists and private citizens in Uganda, and help them in their courageous struggle for a country free of dictatorship, censorship, and repression. Your global influence gives you the opportunity to make a hugely influential condemnation of Museveni's regime, and to greatly enhance the cause of freedom in Uganda. You have the opportunity to call for the release of all arbitrarily detained citizens, an end to police brutality and regime political violence, intimidation and censorship, and new free and fair elections. The time for Uganda's citizens, it would appear, is now. If you have any questions, you can contact me at (212) 246-8486 or by e-mail at info@hrf.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thor Halvorssen'.

Thor Halvorssen
CEO and President
Human Rights Foundation