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East Africa: Rein in Region's Trigger-Happy 'Security'

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editorial

Over the past three weeks, security personnel have shot and killed innocent civilians and injured others in Uganda and Kenya, raising questions on whether their training these days still focuses on the principles of keeping law and order in society, or only on how to pull the trigger.

Last week, which closed with the tragedy at Kasubi, where at least two people were shot dead by President Museveni's security, had opened with a security guard at one of the hostels near Makerere University in Kampala opening fire and killing two Kenyan students in the heat of excitement over student guild campaigns.

This came on the heels of the police killing of seven taxi-drivers in Nairobi's

Kawangware slum.

It was reported at around the same time that a policeman shot dead a military officer in Kericho following a bar quarrel.

Prior to this, a police constable had shot Ugandan music icon Moses Saali alias Bebe Cool five times in the leg, and injured his bodyguards with separate shots.

After the Makerere University shooting, the Uganda police moved to disarm private security guards at the hostels.

The rationale was that some private security companies, intent on maximising their profit margins at the expense of their clients, did not spend optimally on training their officials.

However going by the recent shootings that have mostly involved police officials shooting and killing innocent civilians, disarming private security guards is not the solution to this problem.

The problem involves all gunmen supposed to be protecting us and our property regardless of whether they are from private companies or government security agencies, and the solution must involve them all.

It seems our security

agencies have forgotten their traditional role in society or are not trained appropriately.

In both Uganda and Kenya, the public runs away from the police instead of finding a sanctuary in them as the proverbial good guys.

The police should put into practice the basic principles involved in keeping law and order - which include listening, talking and exercising a sober sense of judgment before resorting to force, ideally with non-lethal weapons like batons.

A gun should be the weapon of last resort, to be used when the bad guys are confirmed to be equally armed or attempting to disarm the police official.

Again, when guns are used in civilian situations, they should be loaded with rubber bullets, so that unnecessary deaths, especially from stray bullets, are avoided.

Training in civil security should therefore emphasise non-lethal approaches.

Lastly, private security agencies should always ensure that they invest in appropriate training and not only strive to maximise profits, because a negative reputation for poor gun handling will inevitably lose them business.