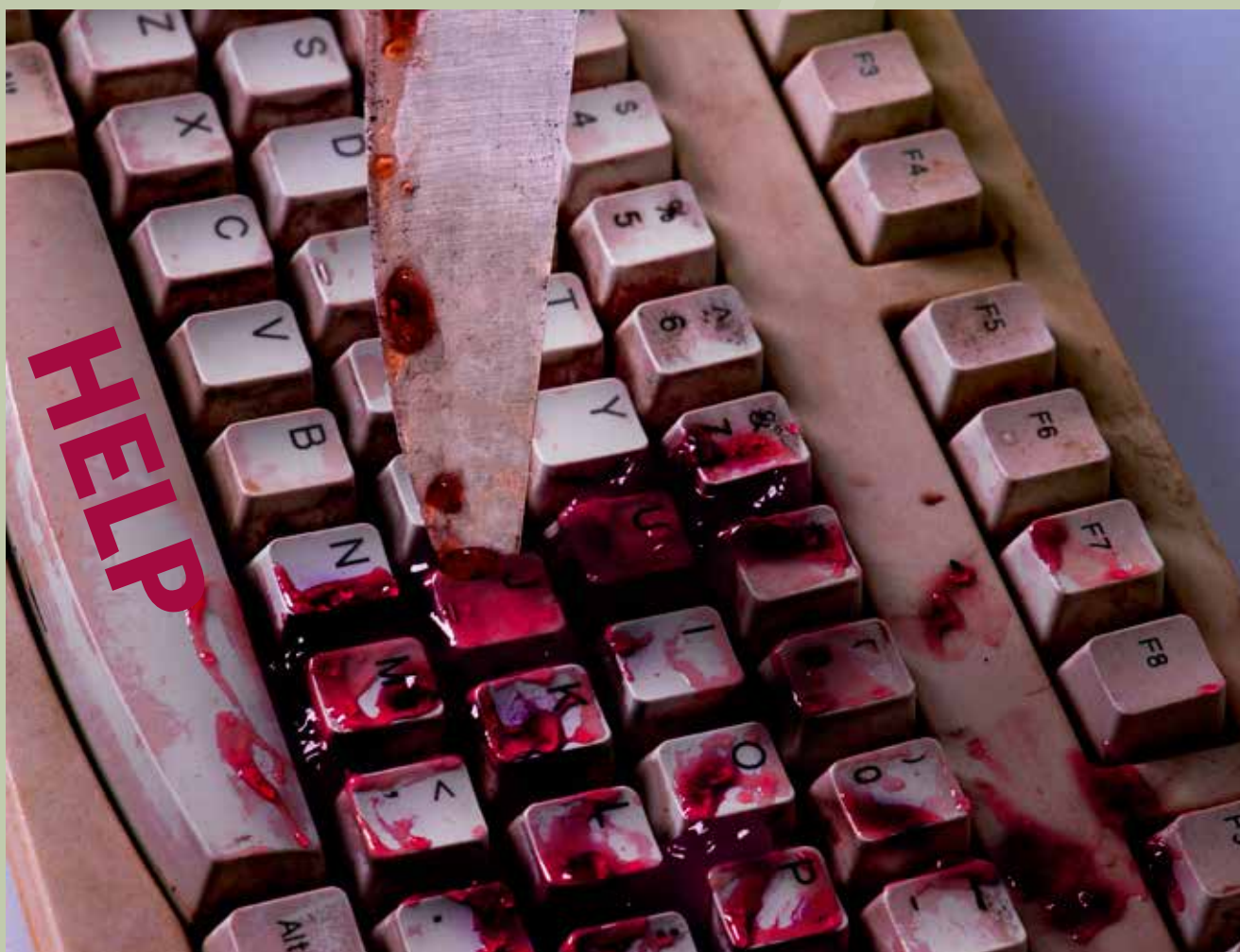


# FEATURE: INTERVIEW WITH PRUDENCE NYAMISHANA 'ON COMBATING ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN'

Arise Reporter

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### What is digital security?

Digital security is protection from intrusion. Take the example of a home where you lock your house with a padlock to prevent access to intruders. That's offline. So, digital security involves 'software' measures such as protection of online accounts such as Facebook and Gmail accounts, and the hardware component such as controlling access to your phone or laptop.

### What are women's rights online?

A woman should be able to access and enjoy internet freedoms just like anyone else. She is not barred from accessing the internet because of her gender. It's about women being able to express self and enjoy the freedom online without any prohibitions. It's safety on online, affordability and accessibility.

### Why is important for women to be online?

Women need to freely express self. It is a space for learning, reading and getting information. It is a space

for connecting, communication, and remember communication is a human right.

Some people say women simply gossip, but who determines so? No one should determine for me what is useful; but I. As long as I am not infringing on the rights of other people, I am free to do what I want. Why is it that nobody says men use the internet unproductively? Don't men share their nudes? Why isn't it talked about, but only women? Let women use the internet the way they want to! Yet I can tell you women use the internet very productively. Many mothers get information online on breastfeeding, for example. Back then, mothers could get such information from their grandmothers, today it's 'Dr Google'. Women are using the internet to market their products. I use it, for example, to share my thoughts through writing. Women use the internet to speak truth to power. We share books on how to empower ourselves, for inspiration, therapy, meditation, prayer, innovations and

tools to solve local problems.

### What is the cost of women not being online?

Women are not homogeneous. Some will miss information on available markets for their products while others will be unable to compare quality and prices. Women will miss out on cheaper sources of information. For example, I can use 500 shillings and get on WhatsApp and get lots of information, but if you're not online, you probably need to call, which will cost you more. Some people will even die for lack of access to information.

### What are the risks and dangers women face online?

The internet is not safe because we live in a patriarchal society. There is open hatred for women. For example, women who drive are branded prostitutes or thieves, yet we, women, work and earn money.



There is stalking; unsolicited love messages as the case was for Hon. Sylvia Rwabwogo because some people think they have power over women. Even when she says no, the man will stalk her, and then the public (media) will act as though they don't understand these issues. You will see a headline 'Man jailed for expressing love to an MP'. That's wrong! It's harassment. It should have been 'Man jailed for cyber stalking or harassment'.

There is cyber bullying. The online space can be like a war zone for women, not to mention leaking of women's nudes, where some women contemplate committing suicide. Yet you will hear some people say 'It's the women who leak these photos', meaning they are to blame. But a woman's body is not a crime; it's my body. It sounds controversial but women have the right to take those photos. It's my body and I know what to do with it.

**So, what is the problem, who is to blame?**

Before a white man (religion) came, some people walked almost naked and there was no big deal about it. Sometimes women in Karamoja and other places walk with their breasts out but the culture there is that you do not touch someone's body who is not your wife. So, when did this thing start that women are supposed to dress a certain way? We have got to stop being hypocrites. The problem today is that a woman's body is sexualised. If in my moment of excitement, I share photos with the person I love, it's within the confines of confidentiality with that person. If those photos get on the internet, it is confidentiality broken. Yet the anti-pornography law will come after me whose nudes were leaked!

The act stipulates 'production and distribution' so if indeed this is pornography, why only come for me and not the one who distributed it? Some will say it's the women who produce it to gain popularity and things like that, but there is no proof that women leak their nudes; it is just an allegation. Besides, why think like that? It's because of patriarchy; it's patriarchy that hates women. It is because everybody, the police know that the crowd will be against women.

**What is the history to online harassment?**

It has come with the internet, and the internet is relatively a new thing. But violence against women offline – men battering their wives, rape, and child marriage – has been there for a long time. We have got to deal with it, however, whether offline or online. One can't say 'it was just a tweet'. Your behaviour offline should reflect your behaviour online. I shouldn't see two people in one: One calling women bitches and the same person talking about respect for women.

**How do we ensure there is a total end to violence against women online?**

You need the will from policymakers to make policies that protect women. We have laws such as the Computer Misuse Act but I have not heard of a situation where a woman is being protected by the Act. Instead it's being used by government to curtail freedoms such as the case of Dr Stella Nyanzi who was expressing herself but the government came after her. We just do not need policies or laws but policymakers who understand the devastation that online violence poses to women and girls.

We have made progress on physical violence. For example, we have the

Domestic Violence Act (2010) where women can seek redress, but when it comes to online violence, you will be referred to this or that law. We need a specific law on violence against women and girls online, the way we have the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, (2010). We need a law that is explicit so that you do not have to look for a section or line in the Anti-Pornography Act or Computer Misuse Act that talks about violence against women and girls. We need a complete Act that will spell out the consequences of harassing women and girls that women will have as their Bible.

Yes, we have the cyber unit of the police but we need specificity, for cybercrime can be broad and mean anything. Cybercrime can be between nations or banks. We need a specialised unit on violence against women and girls. We have got to realise the seriousness of this crime. Stalking, for example, can lead to death. If a man is obsessed with me, he can physically harm me. Psychopaths can be dangerous. We need judges, lawyers that understand these issues so that women are protected online. Remember there is a big cost for women not being online.

**Are there best practices that Uganda can adopt?**

I need to do more research but I was reading the other day and I saw that in South Africa one can pay as high as 40,000 rand in fines for sharing a woman's nude. That's a hell of a lot of money. There should be heavy price for one to pay. We should also adopt tools that make it easy to track people who shared nudes. Some



say women do not report cases to the authorities, but can they report when they are condemned by the police? They will say 'oli musiwuufu wa mpisa' (bad mannered). The Anti-Pornography Act comes after them, the women who are the victims, not the perpetrators of these crimes. How then can women come out in such circumstances?

We need data privacy and protection not only on Facebook or things like that, but we give out data every day, for example when registering for the national ID, driving permit etc. They have information on what I do, where I live, but how safe is my data with the people I give it? Can we be assured that the people we entrust our data with keep it safe?

#### What can a woman in her individual capacity do to ensure digital security?

Have a password on every device. A password is your padlock. And it should not only be a password but a strong password. Do not share your password with anyone, not even your husband or lover or sibling because that's where problems emanate. Look at it in the way you lock your house

and do not allow intruders. Then do not use one password for everything, for example the same password for your email, ATM PIN or mobile money code. To avoid cases of forgetting multiple passwords, there are tools such as Key Pass where you can keep multiple passwords and have one strong password that protects and gives you access to them all.

Secondly, what you do not want in public, do not keep on your device. You may want it for yourself but it's risky unless when you are comfortable with your body going out there in public because someone can hack into your device. By the way, it may not necessarily be nudes but some confidential information. You need to keep it safe. Read about the trends and understand what's changing. For example, the conversation today is that passwords are becoming a problem so they are creating a facial identifier. Keep up with the trends.

Sometimes people fail to protect self because they feel they do not need to do so: 'I am just an ordinary person, who is after me?' Then one day someone is actually after you. That's why for some people, say, on

Instagram, it is only their friends who can access their accounts. When my account is private, not even Google can access it. The more you get literate in digital technology, the more you will learn to protect yourself. When you build a reputation online, you want to protect it.

#### How do you predict the future of digital security?

It is hard to even predict two years because technology keeps changing. Currently about 46% of Ugandans are connected online. I am not certain of the disaggregated data, but the number of women is lower. More women, however, will increasingly get online but face challenges of being new online. Those online will increasingly know the importance of protecting self.

There will be greater mobilisation online by women, movements such as #WomenMatchUg which was organised online will increase. More women will demand for their rights; women will continue to speak truth to power.