

The Standard

UCU COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

The Standard is published bi-monthly by the UCU Department of Mass Communication

Our view

Rampant thefts: Security should be scrutinised

A new year is welcomed often with ecstasy for various reasons, usually having to do with one's experiences in the past year. The welcoming of a new year is usually based on the hope that it will be better than the previous year.

Our community has in the past year been gripped by an unprecedented scale of theft of electronic items, especially laptops. There have also been numerous incidents of burglary in staff residences on campus. Some of our students have fallen victim to conmen on campus. Some of these incidents have gone unreported.

UCU is the most respected institution in this country. For those who do not know, this university is the best managed with its administrative systems almost perfect. This is not flattery. Taking this institution this far has been a result of consistent effort by us all.

All this great achievement is being undermined by the rising incidents of theft, burglary and other vices. It would be foolhardy for us to throw away our achievements to a few thugs. Everything possible must be done immediately to stop this vice.

We have been told to be vigilant before. That is not enough. We must get to the root of the problem: the management of the security system must change. We believe that those in charge of security are incompetent and should be shown the exit. We must stop behaving like the proverbial ostrich. There is nothing to suggest that our security managers have the requisite skills.

We need to go back to the drawing board. We need the same accountability required of other departments to apply to the security department. We have seen employees lose their jobs in this institution for failing to account for money or other resources. It is also true that the department is headed by a lay man. We must reorganize this vital department and place it in the hands of professionals who will be accountable.

CONTACT INFO:

Epajjar Ojulu - Supervisor
eojulu@ucu.ac.ug

Dennis Wandera - Staff Writer/ News
editor@ucu.ac.ug

Brenda Asiimwe - Staff Writer/ Life style
lifestyle@ucu.ac.ug

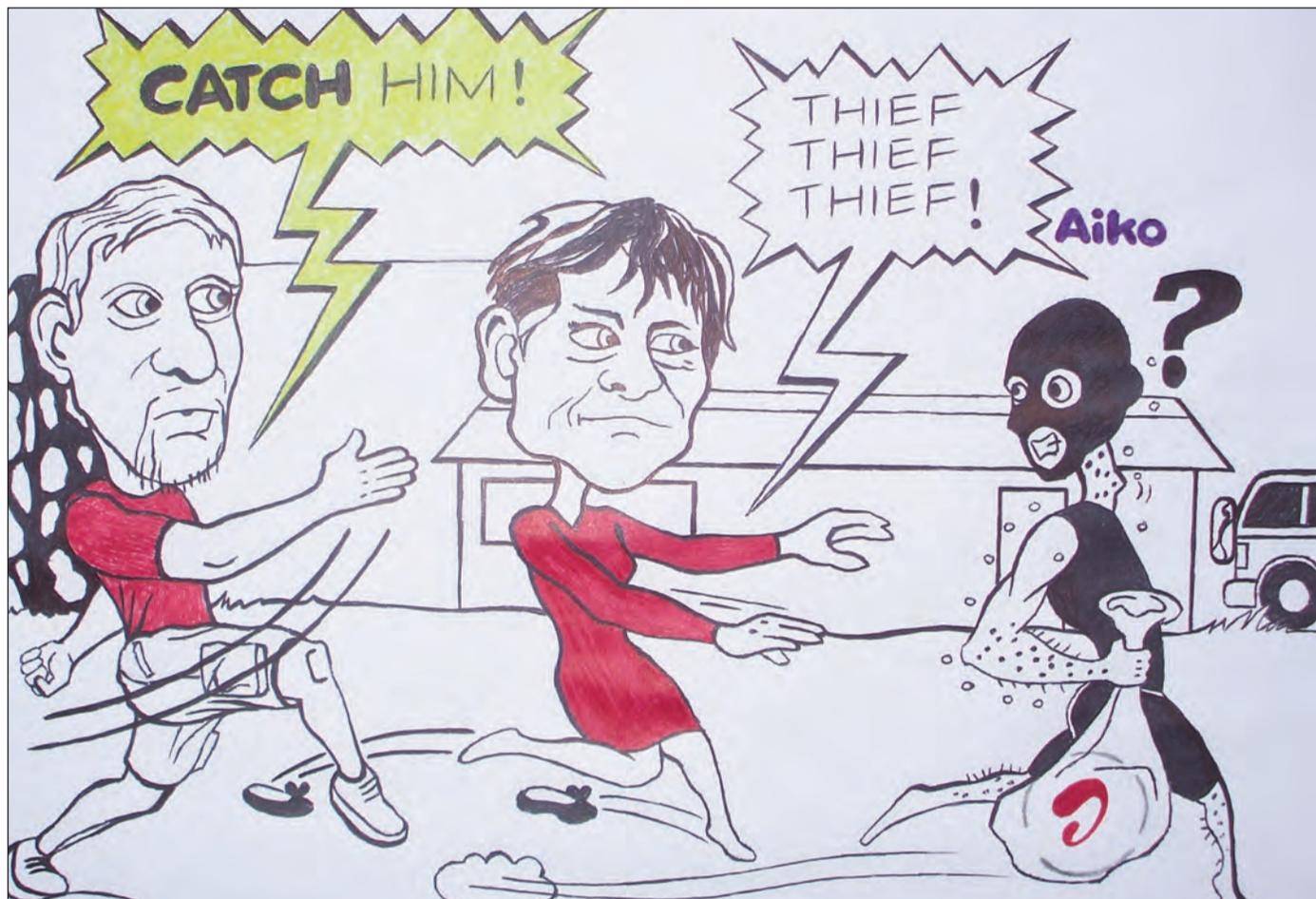
Timothy Murungi - Staff Writer/ Sports
sports@ucu.ac.ug

Sandra Natukunda - Staff Writer/Campus News
campuslife@ucu.ac.ug

Standard News Office: Ext. 879 & 213

<http://thestandard.ucu.ac.ug>

Opinion Opinion Opinion Opinion Opinion



Chasing thieves off UCU's main campus recently became a literal episode for the writer and his wife.

New security plan is a good start; more now needed

THOMAS FROESE



It was the children. "Daddy, daddy," they said, unable to sleep. "What if the thieves are still out there?"

Yes, to add to the rotten tally of 2012, at year-end thieves stole our electric piano, the one my children loved. Six days later, thieves got my bride's laptop plus valuables from her purse.

Two violations in six days from inside our campus home. It took our breath away. Six days.

Of course, we haven't been alone. In fact, 2012 was likely the worst year for thefts in UCU's history. Day after week after month, vehicles and offices and homes were hit as if criminals had easy and free passes.

So it's good news that UCU's leadership has recently released a new security plan for its main campus.

Having formal identification cards for staff, and registration of casual workers, can help. The move to create a new security committee will also go a long way to help ensure that the community has a voice to continue changes as future needs evolve.

The Standard had suggested these things some months ago, which shows the importance of sharing ideas openly and using ones that are reasonable. This is the best way to turn back thieves who have clearly developed a new brazenness.

At this point, we can even imagine or ask 'what if a thief soon hurts, or does something worse, to a UCU child?'

Just two evenings after the second theft from our home, my wife and I even chased a thief across our front lawn. Our evening guests watched the surreal scene in wonder.

Then, not even a week into 2013, another staff residence was hit, robbed in the middle of the night while it was occupied by an unsuspecting family.

So UCU's most vulnerable homes and guest houses need extra protection. This, by now, is painfully clear. In fact, one reason my own home was robbed twice in six days is because we had requested a guard – three times over those six days – but none was sent.

This relates to not just security but cultural norms. A Ugandan named John recently reminded me of this. He was getting his watches fixed in a Kampala shop. I looked in amazement at the service counter.

"I have six broken watches," John told me.

"Six?" I said.

"Only in Uganda. Do you know what I mean?" he said.

John and I then talked more. He's a minister and had preached in Kampala on Christmas Day.

"Nobody listened," he said.

"The church was empty?" I asked.

"No, it was full. But nobody listened," he said.

I didn't know what to say, especially when I learned John had once visited and preached in my hometown in Canada. I turned to my wife. "What are the chances?"

We can't be like that. We can't hear but not really hear. We need to listen, really listen, with our collective mind and heart and soul.

Otherwise, we won't just lose our valuables; we'll lose the very identity that makes UCU a community called to a higher and better life.

In 2013, we hope administration takes an especially harder line on employees found stealing. I personally know of a UCU programme robbed by a UCU staff member, yet two months later this thief is still employed here.

Institutions with more professional security protocol would dismiss or criminally charge such an untrustworthy person.

Yet UCU makes no formal move. Why not? Are tribalism or nepotism or other questionable practices more important?

Separating Security from Projects would also help. These two departments have very different needs. Security could then be led by a chief with better security experience ... and freed to partner more with local police, outside services, or both.

These are just some moves that can be put into the mix to the extent that administration has said its new plan is "a start."

It is a start. We're thankful for it. Now more of the same is needed.

Author and journalist Thomas Froese is the Standard's advisor and founding co-ordinator.
www.thomasfroese.com