



31 October 2024

Vasundhara Oswal

Statement Upon Release From Arbitrary Detention in Uganda

Cherie Blair CBE, KC of Omnia Strategy has said:

“I am pleased that Vasundhara was released on bail last week (on 22 October 2024). This is a belated but much-needed step in the right direction after a traumatising three weeks for her. It is now past time for this saga to come to an end.

With no good reason, Vasundhara was initially detained without charge, repeatedly moved from jail to jail and held in unsanitary conditions without suitable food, medication and proper access to her family or lawyer.

Eventually and in questionable circumstances, Vasundhara was accused of the most serious of crimes without evidence or explanation. These allegations were vehemently denied and, in the last two weeks, the alleged victim has twice sworn under oath that he has been subject to no wrongdoing whatsoever.

In the absence of any evidence whatsoever, the charge against Vasundhara should be dropped immediately. I share the Oswal family’s hope that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions will swiftly move to drop this flawed prosecution. Not only should this help restore faith in the integrity of the Rule of Law in Uganda but address concerns about the heavy-handed treatment of a vulnerable young woman by the authorities.

I look forward to seeing the Public Prosecutor doing the right thing and allowing Vasundhara to rebuild her life and continue the good work she has been doing in Uganda where she has spearheaded PRO Industries’ \$150 million investment in a state-of-the-art ENA plant, the largest in East Africa.”

On the facts reported, the treatment of Vasundhara amounts to a clear case of arbitrary detention and a breach of her human rights according to domestic, continental and international laws and conventions.

Cherie Blair CBE, KC and Omnia Strategy LLP have been retained as international human rights counsel instructed to secure Vasundhara’s release and uphold her rights.

Notes:

1. Vasundhara Oswal is an Executive Director of [PRO Industries](#) which is part of the [Oswal Group](#) Global Conglomerate.
2. Vasundhara is 26 years old. Her achievements have been recognised with awards like the Global Youth Icon Award for 2023 and being named Woman of the Year by the Economic Times.
3. Vasundhara holds Cypriot citizenship. Her parents are Pankaj and Radhika Oswal and she has a sister, Ridi.
4. Vasundhara has been working on commissioning PRO's new ENA plant in Uganda where she leads that project. The plant is based in Luwero and work on the project began in 2020. While working on the project, Vasundhara has been living on and off in Luwero in Uganda.
5. At 0700, on 1 October 2024, around 15 men turned up unannounced at the PRO project site and demanded entry. They were asked to show a warrant but refused. They stated they had attended the site to find a man who was neither an employee of PRO nor had any official links to Vasundhara.
6. The men were armed and purported to be from law enforcement authorities. Reports suggest that at least some of the men claimed to be from INTERPOL.
7. The men searched the property for 5 hours and found nothing. After they had completed the search, they manhandled Vasundhara from the premises and took her away in their vehicle. Reports suggest that Vasundhara's treatment was extremely rough and she was left very distressed.
8. At the same time as Vasundhara was seized, PRO's in-house lawyer, Ms Rita Ngabire, was also detained. Again no basis was provided.
9. Vasundhara was initially detained for approaching 90 hours. Omnia Strategy understands that detention without charge for this period of time is unlawful under Uganda law and that the maximum period allowed is 48 hours. International human rights rules and conventions also hold that the length of Vasundhara's detention would amount to arbitrary detention for which Uganda is accountable.
10. Despite an unconditional release having been ordered by the Chief Magistrate's Court in Kampala on 3 October 2024, the authorities refused to comply with the order and release Vasundhara. She has been kept in what are reportedly inhumane and degrading conditions.
11. After the failure to secure her immediate release, Vasundhara's lawyers applied for a contempt of court order to further compel the Ugandan police to free Vasundhara from unlawful detention. However, just as this order for contempt of court was obtained, and without warning, the Ugandan police presented Vasundhara, on 4 October, to the Magistrate's Court. At this point, for the first time, Vasundhara was faced with a charge of kidnapping with intent to murder. This is a capital offence under Ugandan law, meaning it carries the death penalty. No evidence was produced, nor is the spurious allegation supportable by evidence. Vasundhara vehemently denies the allegation and, throughout, has remained committed to clearing her name, including in the face of baseless media reporting. Despite this, the Magistrate denied bail.

12. Throughout her period of arbitrary detention, Vasundhara was moved a number of times. Neither the family nor anyone else was informed of any reason for Vasundhara being repeatedly moved. No updates were provided as to when moves were to happen, further frustrating her family's and lawyers' efforts to secure access to Vasundhara and to defend her rights.
13. In contravention of international human rights law, including Uganda's obligations, Vasundhara's access to legal counsel has been compromised. Legal visitation is not permitted to be held in private and there are concerns that a phone line used by Vasundhara to speak with her lawyers may have been subject to surveillance by the Ugandan authorities. Indeed, on one occasion, a law clerk who was due to present papers that might have contributed to Vasundhara's release was also arrested and held (without charge or reason for 24 hours).
14. Vasundhara has underlying health conditions that make her acutely vulnerable to diseases including malaria. She is also vegetarian as a matter of her religion and culture (both of which are protected by international human rights law). However, she has been denied access to vital medications and to appropriate food. She has been held in unclean and unpleasant cells. Her treatment puts her at extreme risk given her health conditions while causing affront to her dignity.
15. On 9 October 2024, Omnia Strategy LLP filed a petition for urgent action with the UN [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#) (copied to: the UN [Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers](#)). Omnia set out the compelling humanitarian and legal case and need for a swift and decisive intervention and investigation by the Working Group, and the Special Procedures more broadly. [The story was covered in EUReporter](#) on 11 October.
16. The Oswal family understand that Vasundhara's arbitrary detention is linked to false allegations that the family was somehow involved in the disappearance of Mukesh Menaria. Mr Menaria did not work for Vasundhara or for PRO Industries; he is a former member of Pankaj Oswal's staff. He had taken a loan from the family but then had been caught stealing valuable jewellery from them in Uganda. The family terminated his employment in August 2024.
17. Subsequently, Mr Menaria disappeared. Unable to contact him (through no fault of the Oswal family, and unconnected with Vasundhara), Mr Menaria's family made distressing and unfounded allegations against the Oswal family suggesting they had a hand in his becoming *incommunicado*.
18. Concerned by the disappearance and the ugly, baseless rumours being spread by Mr Menaria's family, the Oswal family tried to trace Mr Menaria and discovered that he had left Uganda on 10 September.
19. The family reported his disappearance to the Ugandan authorities. The Department of Immigration confirmed that Mr Menaria had left the country. This fact was documented in an official report.
20. Subsequently, Mr Menaria was located in Misenyi District, Kagera Region in Tanzania after apparently illegally crossing the border. As a consequence he was initially detained in Tanzania before being released. The family understand he has now returned to India via Uganda.
21. The Oswal family understand that when he was found, Mr Menaria had with him his passport and some of his possessions, and the jewellery he had stolen from Radhika Oswal,

22. While in detention, Mr Menaria swore two separate affidavits, dated 15 and 21 October 2024, in which he confirmed that his situation was not caused by the Oswal family. He was neither kidnapped nor mistreated but rather left Uganda on his own accord.
23. Subsequently, unverified reports suggest that Mr Menaria has revised his story since being released from Tanzanian custody. If true, such inconsistency is troubling and the timing and motivation questionable.
24. The most reliable account of what happened to Mr Menaria remains the two affidavits which were notarised (meaning they were certified by a notary empowered for such tasks as a means of ensuring authenticity of legal documents and preventing fraud) and produced voluntarily before a Commissioner for Oaths.
25. In the 15 October 2024 affidavit (for which there is also accompanying video footage showing Mr Menaria executing the papers), he states (among others):
- *“I verily affirm that at no point in time was I kidnaped [sic] or tortured by my employers [the Oswal family], and I stayed at my own will”*
 - *“I left the Republic of Uganda in my own free will and in the effort of going back to my home in India, and was arrested by the Tanzanian police in Misenyi District”*
 - *“... misunderstandings and disputes arose between my employers and me, leading to disagreements on various matters, These disagreements made me do certain actions against my employers which would be considered dishonesty, breach of confidentiality and/or misappropriation of trade secrets”*
26. In the 21 October 2024 affidavit, Mr Menaria states (among others):
- *“These disagreements made me do certain actions against my employers which would be considered dishonesty, breach of confidentiality and/ or misappropriation of trade secrets in which due to these action my employer did not allow me to travel to India, and instead on my own will I stayed at Luweroo [sic] PRO site as we finalized issues between ourselves an action which I personally agreed to but was unfortunately considered by my son as harassment and thus making him initiate a complaint at the police in the Republic of Uganda”*
 - *“That I hereby categorically deny any statement or action taken by my son, Vishnu Menaria, that contradicts any statement or assertion made in this affidavit. I affirm that any such assertions are made with falsehood and ill intent in association with one Santosh Venkata Dwibhashi to extort money from my employers, of which I am not a part”*
27. Vasundhara was released on bail on 22 October 2025, 21 days after she was seized and 19 days after the unconditional release order.
