



**ADDRESS**

**BY**

**THE HON. THE CHIEF JUSTICE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING**

**OF**

**THE 23<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL JUDGES' CONFERENCE**

**JANUARY 31<sup>st</sup> TO 3<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY, 2022**

**HELD AT MESTIL HOTEL, KAMPALA**

The Rt. Hon. Deputy Speaker of Parliament  
My Lords the Chief Justices Emeritus  
My Lord the Deputy Chief Justice  
My Lords the Deputy Chief Justices Emeritus  
The Hon. Minister of Justice & Constitutional Affairs  
The Hon. Learned Attorney General  
My Lord the Principal Judge  
My Lords the Principal Judges Emeritus  
My Lords the Justices and Judges of the Ugandan Courts of  
Judicature  
My Lord the Chairperson Judiciary Training Governing Council  
My Lord, the Executive Director Judicial Training Institute  
My Lords the Retired Justices and Judges  
Hon. Members of the Diplomatic Corp  
The Hon. Members of Parliament  
My Lord the Chairperson of the Judicial Service Commission  
My lord The Director of Public Prosecutions  
The Head of the Civil Service  
The Hon. Members of the Judicial Service Commission  
The Hon. Members of the Judiciary Council  
Heads of Government Departments and Institutions  
The Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary  
Your Worship The Chief Registrar  
Your Worships the Registrars  
Our Esteemed Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I welcome you all, with great warmth, to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Judges Conference; commencing this 31<sup>st</sup> day of January 2022. I profoundly thank each of you, for graciously honouring our invitation to attend this Conference. I should like to, at the very outset, thank the Lord God for His glory in protecting us from the ravages of the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic; and we beseech Him to afford us continued protection from all forms of harm. I also seize this occasion to again congratulate, and welcome, the Justices and Judges who were appointed to the Judiciary in the year 2021. You, each, give further strength to the Judiciary in the exercise of our mandate to render justice to all people of, and in, Uganda; pursuant to our constitutional mandate.

It is at the Judges Annual Conference where we subject ourselves to self-appraisal with regard to our performance in the previous year under review, examine the progress made in service delivery, and reflect on the opportunities available, as well as the challenges we are confronted with. This enables us to chart the way forward, and improve on our performance in the administration of justice. The theme for the 2022 Conference is: **“The Administration of the Judiciary Act, and Sustainable Transformation of the Judiciary”**. The choice of this theme is determined by the need to transform the Judiciary landscape by ensuring our robust and equitable presence and visibility all over Uganda; to afford all justice seekers the much cherished dependable ease of access to justice. This theme therefore challenges us all to focus on the Judiciary Vision and Mission, and to re-examine how we have executed our mandate;

and then identify how best to respond to the needs, expectations and aspirations of the people of, and in, Uganda.

With the direct intervention of the President, following our presentation of the urgent need to strengthen the hand of the Judiciary to enable us meaningfully execute our mandate, the Judiciary's Budget was, this FY 2021/2022, enhanced from UGX **199bn to 376bn**. This remarkable consideration has enabled us to embark on and register commendable accomplishments. I take the opportunity of this occasion to again profusely hail H.E. The President for demonstrating effective commitment to ensure that the people enjoy meaningful access to justice. Furthermore, the President has agreed on the need for the Judiciary budget to reach UGX.**800bn** as presented by the Judiciary. To this end, he has directed the Ministry of Finance to ensure that this is realised through progressive enhancement of the budget within the medium term of three FYs; beginning this FY 2021/2022, in which the budget increment has commenced as shown above.

We are inundated with justified incessant demands from all over the country for Courts of judicature. This is proof of how people yearn for accessible judicial services. I am glad to report that with the enhanced funding, and in the pursuit of our mission to equitably accord the people easy and meaningful access to justice, we shall this FY 2021/2022, increase the High Court coverage in the country by operationalizing the functioning of six new High Court Circuits; namely **Moroto, Tororo, Iganga, Luwero, Hoima, and Rukungiri**. We have also made progress in construction and renovation of a number of Court

premises and Justice centres, including the Judiciary Headquarters, the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal twin tower.

We have secured land in Gulu and Mbarara for the construction of the first two Regional Courts of Appeal. We have embarked on our undertaking to have a Chief Magistrate in each District, and to establish a Magistrate Grade One Court in every Constituency. A number of Local Governments across the Country have availed us land for construction of Courts. A few have offered actual premises from which the Courts of law may commence operation. We commend this spirit.

In the area of Human resource, I am glad that with the increased budgetary allocations in the year 2021, we have recorded unprecedented recruitment of Judicial officers. The Judicial Service Commission has been able to recruit or promote the following Judicial officers:

<b>SN</b>	<b>POSITION</b>	<b>NUMBER RECRUITED</b>
1	Justices of Court of Appeal	02
2	Judges of the High Court	05
3	Registrars	03
4	Deputy Registrars	16
5	Assistant Registrars	07
6	Chief Magistrates	25
7	Principal Magistrate Grade 1	01
8	Senior Magistrates Grade 1	02
9	Magistrates Grade 1	91

The Judicial Service Commission has commenced the process of recruiting more officers; namely 03 Justices of the Supreme Court, 14 Judges of the High Court; 09 Deputy/Assistant Registrars, 33 Chief Magistrates and 64 Senior/Principal Magistrates Grade One, and a further 51 Magistrates Grade One; in addition to hundreds of support staff to beef up the various newly constituted Courts stations. The 14 judges of the High Court to be recruited this year will enable the Judiciary to immediately operationalize the functioning of the six more High Court Circuits; namely: Moroto, Tororo, Iganga, Luwero, Hoima, and Rukungiri.

My Lords, the time has come for us to re-strategize on how best to respond to the demands of justice seekers. We can do this by ensuring regular hearing of cases, timely delivery of judgments and rulings, effective supervision of lower Courts, and enhancement of access to justice for all persons through increased and progressive innovations in adjudication. The current challenges affecting our operations are gradually but surely being addressed. Upon our achieving the targeted manpower recruitment, more Courts across the country will have Judicial officers deployed therein. This will enable speedy disposal of disputes; and thus release a great deal of resources to the economy. The benefits of speedy trials as dictated by Article 28 (1) of the Constitution are enormous. It is an economic stimulus and incentive for local and international investments. It sustains the rule of law, good governance, sustainable peace and national security and stability.

My Lords, as we anticipate dividends from an expanded staff recruitment, allow me to draw your attention to the Judiciary Strategic Development Plan, which is the vehicle for efficient, focused, and reliable delivery of justice. In building a sustainable, reliable and transformed justice system, we have realigned all our priorities with the Judiciary Strategic Plan V (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), which is hinged on the following Strategic Objectives:

- a) To enhance equitable access to Judiciary Services;
- b) To improve Court processes and case management;
- c) To strengthen the use of ICT in the administration of justice;
- d) To develop and support the Judiciary workforce and institutional capacity;
- e) To improve coordination, partnerships and accountability;
- f) To improve public awareness and the image of the Judiciary; and
- g) To enhance resource mobilization and management.

Last year, we published our maiden Annual Performance Report for the year 2020/2021. I am glad to report that; we have expounded these strategies in the Judiciary **Annual Performance Report** for FY 2020/2021 as manifestation of our renewed commitments to transform the Judiciary. Every year, we will continue to account to the people of Uganda by publishing an Annual Performance Report in accordance with the provisions

of section 39(1) of the Administration of the Judiciary Act, 2020.

During the last calendar year, the Judiciary recorded exceptional performances, despite COVID-19 pandemic. For the year 2021, **the High Court Registered 35,946 cases and Completed 27,558 cases.** While all the Courts registered **198,829 cases and Completed 158,423 cases.** Overall, the Courts recorded an increase in cases registered from **159,543 cases in FY 2019/2020 to 198,829 cases in FY 2020/2021.** I give my highest commendation to each of you, my Lords, for the good progress recorded in the year 2021/2022 despite the challenges posed by the **COVID-19** pandemic. I am confident that during this calendar year, we will take advantage of the available Government support to the Judiciary, and the lifting of the lockdown, to advance our performances even better.

The Judiciary continues to promote and implement alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, mediation, and other innovations such as the Plea-Bargaining Programme, the Small Claims Procedure and Increased use of ICT-based Court services. All these interventions will enhance the disposal of cases in the year 2022. This will be boosted further by the application of **ECCMIS**, Video Conferencing and online services. A phased implementation of ECCMIS was adopted and the 1<sup>st</sup> Phase is planned to cover 18 Court Stations including: The Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal/Constitutional Court, the 7 High Court Divisions, 1 High Court Circuit, 5 Chief Magistrates Courts and 3 Magistrates Grade One Courts.



We have conducted training for Judicial officers and staff in preparation for the implementation of ECCMIS in the 18 Courts. Key Court users, sister agencies and advocates, have also undergone this training. We believe that the use of ECCMIS will ensure the elimination of human contact with litigants in the delivery of Justice; thus greatly minimising associated corrupt tendencies of support staff. My Lords, the current challenges associated with case backlog, lack of transport, limited jurisdiction of Magistrate Courts and limited automation of Courts are all under consideration, and many of these challenges will be dealt with now that Government has committed itself to the elimination of bottlenecks in the administration of Justice.

In our bid to transform the Judiciary to give a more reliable service to all our people, we shall continue to treasure our cooperation, coordination and networking with all the justice institutions to make it a less costly process and a corrupt-free service. However, fully attaining access to justice will depend on all the government agencies like ODPP and Police, JSC, UHRC and other JLOS institutions are appropriately strengthened to perform their respective responsibilities. The Judiciary continues to work on reforms in procedural laws and Court processes to leverage access to Justice in the Country. The following rules and guidelines are in advanced stages of completion: Court Bail Guidelines, State Brief scheme, Amicus Curie Rules, Appellate Mediation and Court Bailiff Rules.

Due to the steady transformation of our economy, some of the laws require amendments to bring them in tandem with the ever rising market values of goods and services in the Country. The Magistrates Courts Act for instance limits jurisdiction of Magistrates to only disputes below 50 million shillings. For instance, in the Kampala metropolitan and other cities across the country, a Magistrates Court can hardly, handle land conveyance cases due to the values being in excess of the permissible limit. This means, the majority of land cases are filed at the High Court Land Division or High Court Circuits, which have limited number of Judges.

We have been able to extend timely retirement benefits to their Lordships in accordance with the Law and approved salary structure.

The enhanced budgetary allocation to the Judiciary from 199 Billion to 376 Billion shillings for FY 2021/2022, has seen some improvement in staff recruitment and remuneration for the lower bench; and provision of tools such as vehicles and ICT equipment. We still look forward to the promised further enhancement of our budget funding to be able to realise our targets of:

- a) Recruiting more Judicial and non-judicial officers;
- b) Better salaries and allowances for non-Judicial staff;
- c) Building more Courts and Justice Centres;
- d) Establishing and strengthening e-justice;

- e) Operationalising all the gazetted High Court Circuits and gazetting more;
- f) Decentralizing the Court of Appeal to the various Regions starting with Gulu, and Mbarara, come next Financial year, among others.

The Judiciary is committed to upholding the rule of law, promoting good governance, and contributing to a peaceful and harmonious society. I am confident that sustainable access to justice is equal to sustainable peace, security and development; each of us just needs to do our part individually and collectively for the good of our country. I urge you my Lords, to always serve with utmost humility and integrity and make upright decisions without fear, favour, malice, affection, or ill-will. Execute your duties diligently and efficiently to eliminate perceived and actual corruption, and refrain from acts that lead to public mistrust in the institution as we strive to deliver justice for all.

As you execute your individual mandate, please reflect on 2 **Chronicles 19: 5-7** which says:

*“He appointed judges in the land in each of the fortified cities of Judah. He told them, consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the land, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.”*

I implore you to take advantage of the materials and key messages provided by the select team of facilitators in this Conference, to enable each one of you reflect on these values and rejuvenate yourselves in the pursuit of our common vision and mission. It is my well-founded belief that the Judiciary will overcome structural challenges and functional limitations which currently manifest, sometimes, in form of inaccessible Courts, limited numbers of staff in Courts, absenteeism, missing records/files, corruption and delayed delivery of judgments or rulings.

In line with the Government commitment to enable us attain efficient and effective service delivery, our focus is to ensure that justice is easily and effectively accessible by every person in this Country. I am glad that the Government has already demonstrated to us its commitment towards realising these aspirations. It is now incumbent on us all to innovate and develop a pro-people centred service and to harness the benefits ushered in by the Administration of Judiciary Act, 2020. The ball, as the saying goes, is in our Court - we must champion the cause of justice for which we each took oath; and for which we must walk the talk. We undertake to do that; and we have already embarked on the journey. May the Good Lord be on our side to witness these cherished reforms.

I also extend our profound appreciation to the Legislative Arm of Government; the Administration of Justice Programme Institutions, the Civil Society Organisations, the Justice Law and Order Institutions, the Development Partners and the media

fraternity for your indispensable contribution towards the administration of Justice in this Country. In a special way, I thank all the retired Chief Justices, Principal Judges, Justices and Judges for your indelible contributions to the Judiciary Service; and more so for finding time to come and share with us your rich experiences. My Lords, we continue to build the new Judiciary from the foundational stones which you securely laid during your active time in service; for which we are much indebted.

I once again thank our team of facilitators for accepting to come and take the Justices and Judges through this year's conference. I thank the Chairperson Judiciary Training Governing Council, Director Judicial Training Institute and all the staff for making it possible for us to convene here today despite the COVID-19 challenges.

May the Lord God Bless us in our deliberations in this Conference.

**I THANK YOU ALL.**

Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo  
**CHIEF JUSTICE**