



**COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR FOR THE JUDGES MEETING HELD ON 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2017 AT THE SPEKE COMMONWEALTH RESORT, MUNYONYO**

My Lord the Deputy Chief Justice

My Lord the Principal Judge

My Lords the Justices of the Supreme Court

My Lords the Justices of the Court of Appeal

My Lords the Judges of the High Court

The Secretary to the Judiciary

The Chief Registrar.

Good afternoon,

I welcome you all to the Judges Meeting, 2017. This inaugural meeting should be used as a launch pad for laying out strategies for improving the administration of justice and confronting the challenges impacting negatively on our work. The meeting should also build on some of the recommendations and best practices that have so far come from the Annual Judges Conference for a brighter future for the courts.

My Lords, Judges play a critical role in society and it is therefore important that they are given adequate working tools, competitive remuneration and protection to do their work freely, confidently, professionally and with the competency that Ugandans expect of a post 1995 Constitution, Judiciary. The flip side of the coin is that Ugandans, too, expect Judges to be accountable to the law and for the resources entrusted to them.

That is why I have been going at great length to advocate for improved integrity, resources and capacity of the Judiciary as well as, investing in building good relations with our partners, especially the Development Partners, and the other arms of the State, whose support is crucial in securing resources and guarantees for the Judiciary to do its work efficiently and effectively.

Yesterday, H.E The President undertook to support the Judiciary to do its work. He also called for a meeting in early February, to discuss facilitation and remuneration for Judges. Such opportunities are not many and should therefore; seize the opportunity and goodwill offered by the President to secure resources for the top most priorities of the Judiciary, especially automation of the courts, infrastructure needs and adequate operational resources to fund court sessions and related work of the Judiciary. Our case should be that we are integral to the national priorities, for transiting Uganda from what it is today to a middle-income country and should be given the same priority like the enabling sectors. However, in arguing our case, we must ensure that the Judiciary remains independent and true to its Constitutional calling.

On our part, we must drop habits of delay, neglect of duty and instead run our courts with professionalism and do our work with integrity, fairness and without sacrificing quality, impartiality and fairness to the parties. But in so doing the courts must use court time and resources efficiently, so that cases do not cost more than what is justifiably due to them, in time and resources.

I will now address you on pertinent issues affecting our work.

## **IMPROVING THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE FOR JUDICIAL OFFICERS**

The Judiciary needs well-remunerated judicial officers and staff to discharge the important task of administering justice. I recently drew this matter to H.E. the President, when Government selectively increased salaries of a few public officers including the Deputy Chief Justice and myself.

As you heard yesterday, the President promised to review this matter soon and undertook to meet the Judges in early February 2017, to address the issue. I am tasking the Secretary to the Judiciary to follow up this matter with State House and arrange a meeting with the President. In the meantime, I urge Judges to be steadfast and calm as Government addresses the challenge. I expect the revised salaries of judges to be above 15.5 million for a High Court Judge, since our salaries will be used as the anchor in determining other salaries.

## **ADMINISTRATION OF THE JUDICIARY BILL**

Progress has been made on the Judiciary Administration Bill by addressing retirement Benefits for Judges that had held up the Bill. A Judge will now retire with:

- A House;
- Monthly pension;
- Vehicle;
- Medical allowance; and
- Security paid for by the State.

Retirement benefits for the lower Bench are still under discussion. It is proposed that they be given housing and medical allowance on retirement. Retirement benefits will only be earned on hitting the retirement age to avoid abuse and shall be reviewed every five years to reflect economic realities of the country.

## **RELATIONS WITH THE LEGISLATURE AND THE EXECUTIVE**

In the recent past, we have had tensions with one arm of the State. As your leader, I took up the matter with the Executive and Legislature. We resolved the impasse by reiterating that the independence of the Judiciary is essential for the well being of a democracy. We agreed that the three arms of the state should observe principles of mutual respect, dialogue, partnership and unconditional respect for the constitutional role of each arm of the State, whenever there are challenges.

## **CORRUPTION**

My Lords, the integrity of the entire Bench is non negotiable because integrity is the lifeblood of the Judiciary. The higher Bench must, therefore take the lead in preserving the integrity of the Judiciary. We should lead by example; live by example and walk the talk as well as fight corruption whenever it is or wherever it might be and in whatever form it may be.

I am forced to draw this matter to your attention following growing noise of real or perceived corruption in our ranks. This is a matter that should therefore concern you, as it concerns me.

Each of us must carry out self-examination and retrospection and renew our commitment to the Oath we took and respect the Judicial Code of Conduct, if we are to restore the good name of the Judiciary. This is a war we can as individuals and collectively.

## **THE WORK**

I would like to appreciate the great effort you all put in in 2016. We achieved many milestones including completing election petitions by the Supreme Court and the High Court below the statutory allotted time. The Court of Appeal exceeded their target by 200 appeals and Mbarara High Court finally resolved a 30-year old land dispute.

However, as the Census Report shows, backlog still remains a big threat to the integrity, viability, relevance and effectiveness of the Judiciary in Uganda. Therefore, winning the war against this backlog must be prioritized to restore confidence in the Judiciary and breathe life in the capacity of the court, to positively impact on the well being of the Country.

We must fight our own '*kisanja hakuna mchezo*'. We must do our work without *mchezo* beginning with the old cases and cases that have a big impact on society. Backlog must be fought with proactiveness, speed, and vigour; with the Judges taking the lead and personal responsibility for completing of cases.

In conclusion, we have made impressive strides in the administration of justice. We have been the most resilient institution, surviving state collapse and the worst of all times. We have led in judicial innovations and best practices in the region. We pioneered in setting up the Commercial Court and the Anti Corruption Division of the High Court to deal with the most pressing development challenges of our time. This therefore means that we have the potential to overcome our challenges, however insurmountable they may be. I have no doubt that 2017 will be a consequential year for the Judiciary.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and a happy new year.

**Bart M Katureebe**  
**CHIEF JUSTICE**