



SPEECH OF THE RT. HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER OF UGANDA AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE EAST AFRICAN MAGISTRATES AND JUDGES CONFERENCE HELD AT THE SPEKE RESORT HOTEL MUNYONYO – 1ST NOVEMBER 2016

My Lord the Chief Justice of Uganda,

My Lords the visiting Chief Justices,

My Lord the Deputy Chief Justice of Uganda,

My Lord the Principal Judge of Uganda,

My Lords the Justices and Judges present,

The President of the East African Magistrates and Judges Association,

Your Worships,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and joy to be with you on this auspicious occasion and welcome you to this important conference of East African Magistrates and Judges Conference. To our visitors from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, South Africa and the United Kingdom, I say *Karibuni* to the pearl of Africa.

I congratulate the Chief Justice of Uganda, the Ugandan Judiciary and the people of Uganda at large, for once again hosting the East African Magistratesø and Judgesø Conference. I am especially gratified to see that the Judiciaries of East Africa are doing their part in fostering linkages and partnerships amongst themselves in the true spirit of regional integration.

My Lords, ladies and Gentlemen, your theme of **Transformation of Judiciaries in East Africa for Improved Service Delivery: Successes, Challenges and Strategies**, is well suited to not only mentally transform East African judicial system, but also to firmly put our justice system in the centre of service delivery for our people. Challenges notwithstanding, we will continue to leverage on the recent innovations in ICT to expeditiously dispense justice to all the parties concerned.

Today as you seek to share experiences toward inching further up the road to transformation, let me share a few thoughts to bear in mind as you continue your deliberations.

Trade is the cornerstone of regional integration. Intra East African Trade has significantly increased since the coming into force of the Treaty re-establishing the East African Community in 2000. The East African Common Market Protocol seeks to remove barriers to trade by providing the legislative environment for the free movement of labour, capital, goods and services in the region. Judiciaries of partner states are charged with the responsibility of implementation of the law. The question may arise as to when exactly this responsibility begins?

Courts therefore, must endeavour to clear all the business before them promptly and in a business manner because any delay in the administration of justice holds the pace of integration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it cannot be over emphasised that the Judiciary is indispensable in the transformation of society. As experience demonstrates, an excellent Judiciary is fundamental to democracy. In the recent past, the Judiciaries in the region have in record time, dealt with election petitions arising out of Presidential or Parliamentary Elections, demonstrating that there is a civilised way of handling disputes instead of taking up unconstitutional means to change Governments.

Drawing from history again, the Judiciary has been at the centre of correcting century long injustices against humanity. Slavery was brought to its knees by courts. It is the Judiciary that came out strongly to protect the women, giving effect to equality of men and women. It is the

Judiciary that dealt a blow to discrimination based on colour and race. The Judiciary has also been central to the development debate by ensuring that trade prospers in a climate of justice and full enjoyment of fundamental rights.

In this regard, therefore, Judiciary will be an integral factor in steering Uganda from a peasant society to a progressive and middle-income status by 2020. Government is looking at the Judiciary to maintain stability and peace necessary for economic growth. It is, therefore, a fact of life, that investing in Judiciaries is no longer a luxury but a necessary prerequisite for the transformation of individual partner states, and the region.

In this regard, we also salute you for embracing Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and the campaign against case backlog.

In spite of these glowing achievements, the pace of transformation in our Judiciaries remains work in progress. If we want to transform the Judiciary, we must pay attention to increasing public confidence, trust and satisfaction in the administration of justice. Judiciaries must focus on cultivating judicial independence, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of service, and opening up courts to the poor and vulnerable, who feel excluded from the judicial process. Case backlog and delay of cases should be addressed urgently through timely disposal of cases and expanded capacity of specialized courts to deal with increasing number of cases.

Rules of Procedure, Court processes and policies should be structured around enabling the least served segments of the population to access court services, just like the privileged. *Concierge* services at the court, with fully staffed customer care staff points, should be employed to ease access, and make courtroom user experience memorable for all court users.

Corruption in our court systems must be addressed through bold and comprehensive interventions. We should avoid cosmetic solutions by embracing revolutionary methods that address corruption from its roots.

Automating judicial services must take centre stage in the modernisation and enhancement of service delivery. Use of real time court recording systems, video conferencing and electronic presentation of evidence can greatly curtail the time trials take place in court as well as cutting out opportunistic corruption arising out of artificial delays. Let me however; caution you that

automating justice is not a *panacea* for reform because machines depend on people and people using them.

Government also salutes legal aid service providers who labour to make free legal services available to the most vulnerable to enable them access our legal systems. Investing in legal aid is a versatile weapon that Governments in the region can deploy to assist the poor and vulnerable persons to meaningfully access justice. As experience has shown elsewhere, offering a comprehensive legal aid not only reduces corruption and case backlog, but also produces better outcomes for the administration of justice.

Finally, transformation is nothing without the right people within the Judiciaries with the positive attitude towards administration of justice. Public confidence in the Judiciary is largely determined by how the users of Judiciaries are treated during the course of seeking judicial redress. A Judiciary may be comprised of first class ICT systems, modern buildings, and adequate stationery, but if its human resource is apathetic, lazy, and corrupt, transformation will be impossible to achieve.

Sufficient time and resources in the form of skill development, periodic performance enhancement, and suitable salaries should be invested in the staff to create a workforce that shall appropriately drive the vision for transformation to its logical conclusion.

With these remarks, it is my honour and pleasure to officially open the East African Magistrates and Judges Conference.

I thank you.

Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda

PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA