



News Release

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Judiciary Council registers remarkable success two years later

Barely two years after its operationalization, the Judiciary Council an organ established under the Administration of the Judiciary Act, 2020 to provide strategic advice to the Chief Justice on matters of policy and administration of the Judiciary, has registered great strides to improve administration of justice

The Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu who is the Secretary of the Council noted that the Administration of the Judiciary Act, 2020 deemed as a game changer legislation for the Judiciary not only operationalized Chapter 8 of the Constitution but also birthed the Judiciary Council.

She said the pioneer Council chaired by the Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny – Dollo, is mandated to advise on policies for planning and development; ethics and integrity; financial matters; staff welfare and development; administration of justice and such other matters relating to the general administration and operations of the Judiciary.

Improved physical access to justice

Inaugurated on 30th March 2021, the Council sanctioned the expanded structure and establishment for Judicial Officers which was approved by Cabinet on 8th August 2021.

Some of the highlights of the expanded structure included the increase in the number of justices of the Supreme Court from 10 to 20; the Court of Appeal from 14 to 55 and the High Court judges from 82 to 150. Also expanded was the number of Chief Magistrates from 100 to 160 and Magistrates Grade 1 from 386 to 514. The implication of this expanded structure is that there will be regional Courts of Appeal, more High Court Circuits, a Chief Magistrate in every district and a Magistrate Grade One in every constituency. The Judiciary is progressively filling these vacancies with High Court now having 72 Judges. For the first time the Judiciary has 77 Chief Magistrates and 301 Magistrates Grade One.

As a result of these recruitments the Judiciary's coverage has improved with six High Court Circuits of Hoima, Rukungiri, Iganga, Tororo, Luwero and Moroto operationalized; 16 Chief Magistrates Courts of Isingiro, Sironko, Mayuge, Kiryandongo, Dokolo, Oyam, Bubulo, Lugazi, Kyenjojo,

Kamwenge, Pader, Katakwi, Rakai, Kumi, Kira and Kotido. Prior to these recruitments and deployments, the Judiciary had only 42 Chief Magistrates most of whom were circuiting between two to five Magisterial areas. For example, in 2020 the Chief Magistrate of Fort Portal was caretaking Kyenjojo, Bundibujjo, Ntoroko Kamwenge and Kasese Magisterial areas.

The Magistrate Grade One Courts of Kyotera, Kyanika, Kole, Lamwo, Kyazanga, Kagulumira, Namungalwe, Kibito and Nyarushanje were also operationalized.

The increased deployment registered a significant reduction of case backlog in the Magistrate Grade One level from 5,085 in November 2021 to 2,687 at the close of June 2022.

Improved terms and conditions of service regulations

The Council also sanctioned the improved terms and conditions of service for the lower bench making the Judiciary a very attractive employer for lawyers.

Regulations for efficiency in the administration of justice

In giving effect to the Administration of the Judiciary Act, the Council has recently approved the Regulations on Committees and the Inspectorate of Courts.

The objectives of the Inspectorate of Courts are to promote good governance in the Judiciary Service; promote the highest standards of integrity among the staff of the Judiciary Service; ensure compliance with constitutional and statutory standards on the administration of justice; and promote compliance with the Uganda Judicial Code of Conduct and the Judiciary Service Code of Conduct; ensure compliance with service delivery standards and the charter of the Judiciary; and promote quality assurance in the administration of justice.

The Inspectorate Regulations institutionalize Peer Committees as a soft tool to promote adherence to the code of conduct and revive the Judiciary Integrity Committee that will coordinate the Peer Committees.

The Judiciary plans to put in place a robust Inspectorate of Courts decentralized to the different regions.

According to the Chief Registrar, the expansion and decentralization of the Inspectorate of Courts is very critical and the same is planned for the current Financial year. We await the recruitment of more judicial officers especially in the ranks of Deputy and Assistant Registrars to be deployed as Inspectors. We want to tackle the vice of absenteeism and unethical conduct seriously by ensuring the presence of Inspectors across the Courts in the country.

As regards the Committees, the Chief Justice is mandated to establish Committees in the Judiciary to assist in the administration of justice.

Besides the statutory committees provided for in Administration of the Judiciary Act like the Planning, Development and Finance; the Audit Committee, the Human Capital, Development, Gender and Equity Mainstreaming Committee and the Information, Communications Technology and Documentation Committee, other Committees provided for in the Regulations include the Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee, the Case Management Committee and the Performance Management and Awards Committee.

Infrastructural development

On infrastructural development, the Council resolved was instrumental in the formulation of the Guidelines for Architectural Designs (Standardization of Courthouses) that provides the minimum standards to be considered while designing and constructing Court houses. The guidelines aim to provide a safe, conducive and uniform working environment for all Courts and will resultantly give a common outlook and identity of the Judiciary. Court designs will be anchored in the current development and management strategy of the Judiciary to include enhanced staffing, facilities for persons with disabilities, modern technological systems purposive functional interior designs to mention but a few. An Infrastructure subcommittee has been appointed by the Chief Justice that will oversee the implementation of these guidelines.

As a measure to improve infrastructural development in the institution, the Council shall periodically conduct ad hoc inspections on construction works and companies that undertake shoddy works, shall be blacklisted. The Council resolved that the where necessary audits on the structures shall be taken and appropriate action taken.

Quality assurance, feedback mechanisms

HW Langa said the Council has underscored the importance of capacity building- effective induction and continuous on job training plus close supervision in the improvement of staff or the software who form the most critical resource of the Judiciary. In August and September, two weeks' induction trainings were conducted for newly appointed Chief Magistrates and Magistrates Grade One. The 16 recently appointed judges are also scheduled for two weeks' induction training this November. Mentorship programmes are also being developed for newly appointed officers.

Composition of the Council

The members of the Council are the Chief Justice, Deputy Chief Justice, Attorney General, Principal Judge, Chief Inspector of Courts, one Justice representing the Superior Courts, the Chairperson of the Uganda Law Council, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Solicitor General, the

Chief Registrar, the Secretary to the Treasury, Secretary to the Judiciary, one representative of the Justice Law and Order Institutions, one representative of the lower bench, the President of the Law Society and two members of the public nominated by the Judicial Service Commission.

The procedure of the Council that meets at least once every quarter are governed by the Administration of the Judiciary (Judiciary Council) (Practice and Procedure) Rules, 2021.

Editor's notes

The Constitution Republic of Uganda under article 150(1) mandates Parliament to make such laws providing for the structures, procedures and functions of the judiciary. That constitutional provision was operationalized following the enactment of the Administration of the Judiciary Act, 2020 (AJA).

The functions of the Council are to advise the Chief Justice on policies for planning and development of the judiciary, advise the CJ on matters relating to personnel or staff development and welfare, advise the CJ on ways of securing adequate funding for the Judiciary, and also advise the Chief justice on the improvement of the administration of justice.

The AJA under section 4(4) requires that the Council meets at least once every three months. In compliance with this provision, the Council has since its inception met every quarter commencing the last quarter of Financial year 2020/2021. At the different meetings of the Council, the Council received and discussed performance reports from the different departments of the Judiciary, which reports highlight the achievements and challenges of the Judiciary. It is from those discussions that the Chairperson of the Council, the Chief Justice accounts to the people through the Judiciary's Annual Performance as required under section 39(1) of the AJA. Two Annual performance reports have since been delivered after the constitution of the Council.

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