

**REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND  
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE OPENING OF THE 22<sup>ND</sup>  
ANNUAL JUDGES CONFERENCE, 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2020 AT  
MESTIL HOTEL, KAMPALA**

Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda,  
The Hon. The Chief Justice,  
The Hon. The Deputy Chief Justice,  
The Hon. The Principal Judge,  
My Lords Justices and Judges of the Courts of Judicature,  
The Head of Public Service and Secretary to Cabinet,  
Your Excellency the Ambassadors and Development Partners under the  
Justice, Law and Order Sector,  
Your Worships,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I take the honour and privilege to congratulate you upon completing the calendar year 2019 and warmly welcome you into the year 2020.

I wish to take this opportunity to first express my heartfelt appreciation for having been invited to attend this Judges Conference. As you are all aware, I was only recently appointed to this docket that I now hold. This therefore is a valuable opportunity for me to interface with very important stakeholders of the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) and I warmly welcome the occasion.

Please allow me to pledge my unreserved commitment to facilitating the Judiciary and the entire JLOS Sector in achieving your Vision, Mission and respective mandates.

I would also like to take advantage of this moment to thank His Excellency the President of Uganda who deemed it fit to appoint me to this position.

Your Excellency the President, the Judges Conference is an annual event of the Judiciary aimed at assessing the performance of the Judiciary as an arm of the State and also identifying the challenges which hinder the Judiciary from effectively and efficiently administering Justice to all people living in Uganda as mandated by the Constitution.

Your Excellency, the theme of this year's conference is aligned with Goal number 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals and, in this regard, we commend the Judiciary Administration led by the Chief Justice for the many innovations that have been introduced over the years. These include establishing of Small Claims Procedure Courts, Sentencing Guidelines, Plea Bargaining, Mediation, introduction of a Performance Enhancement Tool and creation of Specialised Divisions of the High Court. Most notable of these are the Divisions geared towards Commercial Justice which resolve commercial disputes expeditiously. All these measures reflect the Government's commitment in making Uganda an ideal destination for foreign investment and a hub for Arbitration where growth and development advance together to transform our economy. Similarly for the economy to grow at the ambitious pace

Uganda has set for itself, we need to improve the ease of doing business for which entrepreneurs need to be assured of speedy enforcement of their contracts and Court decisions.

Your Excellency according to the World Bank (2016 Report), a strong Judiciary is also associated with more rapid growth of small firms and an improved investment climate relies on fair and stable laws, as well as effective justice institutions to apply them. Effective access to justice is also central to reducing poverty, boosting shared prosperity and inclusion, and protecting the rights of the most disadvantaged groups in society.

These measures however would remain insufficient unless justice is available to the common man. The willingness of our citizens to use the formal Court system for dispute resolution depends upon a variety of factors including the legal empowerment of people and their ability to access justice. As an illustration, creating special courts for Domestic or Gender based Violence and sensitising Judges will not be enough if women out there are not aware of their rights or are afraid of approaching the police or the courts. Access to justice is as important as the number of cases disposed. The doors of justice can never be opened by Golden keys alone. We must work in a direction where the poor and marginalised also have equal access to Justice. We must, time and again, challenge ourselves to see if we have been able to fulfil the Constitutional mandate of providing equal access to justice for all.

Dispensation of Justice is also vital for maintaining law and order and peace in the society. As it has been said, **'if you want peace work for Justice.'** In fact the foundation of civilisation rests on a just society.

Your Excellency, I also wish to commend the Judiciary for its efforts to reduce case backlog in the courts. I am informed that the efforts have included use of special sessions, weeding out non-starter cases, deploying more magistrates at districts and applying the innovations which have already been pointed above. However, backlog has not yet been substantially reduced due to limitations in human resource and provision of essential tools of work. The resolution to increase the High Court Judges to 82 as passed by Parliament has not yet been fully operationalised. The recent appointment of Judges to the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and the High Court are indeed welcome and we applaud your Excellency for this development but hasten to add that there are still vacancies in these courts to be filled. We shall pursue this in good time.

Your Excellency, the Magistrates are the foot soldiers serving at the grassroots level. Having sufficient number of Magistrates will go a long way in substantially reducing the existing case backlog in the courts and enhance access to justice at the grassroots.

Your Excellency, there is also unfinished business regarding the passage into law of the Administration of the Judiciary Bill that has been pending in Parliament for quite some time. This Bill needs to be put out of the

way. This law, when passed, will go a great way in actualising the independence and streamlining the operations of the Judiciary.

Your Excellency your tireless efforts to have the terms and conditions of service for the Judicial Officers improved has borne fruit with a reasonable increment in their remuneration last year. We hope that as the economy expands, the terms of all Judicial Officers and the other staff working within the Judiciary will keep improving commensurately.

To the courts, you can achieve justice for all by focusing on results and adding value to the men, women and children who make contact with the courts or are affected by what the court does. No doubt this will call for a departure from the business as usual approach to a culture of results, continuous improvements and taking advantage of the positive forces of change.

With those remarks, let me end by wishing you fruitful deliberations. Thank you for listening to me.

Professor Ephraim Kamuntu

**MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS.**