



THE JUDICIARY

INSIDER

Court Open Days: An Innovation for Improved Stakeholder Engagements



» The Court of Appeal is committed to dispensing justice for all - DCJ Richard Buteera

» Chief Justice establishes new Judiciary Committees for effective administration of justice

NEWS BRIEFS

The year in review in the Judiciary





THE JUDICIARY

PROGRAMME FOR NATIONAL COURT OPEN DAY

Date: 15th April, 2024 | Venue: Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, Kampala

Theme: A People-centred Approach to Justice

Master of Ceremonies: Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu

TIME	ACTIVITY
7:30AM	Procession from High Court to Kololo Ceremonial Grounds
8:00AM	Arrival of members of public
8:30AM	Sensitization on Court processes and tour of exhibition tents
9:00AM	Arrival of Guests
9:30AM	Arrival of the Judges and Justices of Courts of Judicature
9:40 AM	Arrival of the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs
9:50AM	Arrival of the Deputy Chief Justice
10:00AM	Arrival of the Chief Justice
10:10AM	Anthems
10:15AM	Opening Prayer
10:20AM	Welcome Remarks by the Chairperson Organizing Committee
10:35AM	Remarks by UNODC Representative
10:45AM	Brief remarks by select representatives of Legal Aid Service Providers, Justice Institutions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal Aid Service Providers Network on behalf of the public• Uganda Law Society• Director of Public Prosecutions
11:15AM	Presentations by Courts, Chief Inspector of Courts
12:10PM	Question & Answer Session (Chief Registrar)
1:30PM	Remarks by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs
1:10PM	Remarks by the Deputy Chief Justice
1:50PM	Speech by the Chief Justice
2:20PM	Anthems
2:30PM	Group photos
2:40PM	Lunch
	Departure at leisure

NOTE: Tour of Exhibition tents of different Courts and other justice institutions runs throughout the programme



Together we can do so much

Author and activist, Helen Keller, once said, "Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much." These words are so true in every sphere of life, be it at the work place, in our relationships, the school setting, or even the various lessons that life throws at us.

At the Judiciary, this is our riding theme for the year, a people-centered approach to justice. This has enabled us to enhance the spirit of collaboration and cooperation, knowing that by working together, we can create a brighter future for generations to come.

This is not merely something to be feared or resisted but embraced as an opportunity for the transformation of the court system. Whether it's adapting to the evolving landscape of technology, confronting pressing environmental issues, or addressing systemic inequalities and backlog, we are here to administer justice to the people we serve.

As we set our intentions for the year ahead, let us commit ourselves to empathy, compassion, and understanding. Let us strive to build bridges instead of walls, to uplift and empower one another, and to foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity for all.

So as we bid farewell to the year gone by and welcome the dawn of a new beginning, let us embrace change with open hearts and open minds. For it is through change that we find our greatest opportunities for growth, renewal, and transformation.

In this Insider Edition, we take you through the past year and show you the outlook of the New Year. So, here's to a new year filled with hope, possibility, and endless opportunities for positive change. Together, let us make it a year to remember.

Happy reading

HW Sarah Langa Siu
Chief Registrar/Editor-in-Chief

INSIDE.

- 2** Court Open Days: An Innovation For Improved Stakeholder Engagements

- 5** 25th Annual Judges' Conference: Judges agree to a people-centered approach to justice

- 7** New Law Year 2024: Chief Justice accentuates cooperation between the Bar and the Bench

- 9** Highlights of the Financial Year 2022/23 Annual Performance Report

- 12** Judiciary Priorities for 2024

- 16** The Court of Appeal is committed to dispensing justice for all - Deputy Chief Justice Richard Buteera

- 19** Court of Appeal holds 11 Criminal Appeals sessions to fight case backlog

- 20** Principal Judge's memorable quotes at launches of nine new High Court Circuits

- 23** Progress on the daily hearings at the Criminal Division

- 25** Chief Justice establishes new Judiciary Committees for effective administration of justice

- 25** Chief Justice issues new Inspectorate of Courts Regulations

- 27** The year in review in the Judiciary

- 38** I am glad to have served the Judiciary for 33 years - Ssenyonjo

- 39** My first eight months as Chief Magistrate of Yumbe/Koboko courts

EDITORIAL TEAM

Chief Registrar/Editor-in-Chief	HW Sarah Langa Siu
Public Relations Officer	HW James Ereemye Jumire Mawanda
Principal Communications Officer/Editor	Sheila Wamboga
Senior Communications Officer/Copy Editor	Halimah Kaggwa
Contributors	Contributors; HW Freddie Awacnedi, Rose Namanya, Rose Ampurira and Danielle Nalukenge
Photography	Danielle Nalukenge
Design/Layout	Peter Mugeni Wanyama



Court Open Days: An Innovation for Improved Stakeholder Engagements

Under Article 126 (1) of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, judicial power is derived from the people and shall be exercised by the Courts established under the Constitution in the name of the people and in conformity with the law, values, norms, and aspirations of the people. The core mandate of the Judiciary is to adjudicate cases of a civil and criminal nature.

Public perception about the Judiciary is often affected by misconceptions and misunderstandings about the institutional mandate, as well as attitudes that have undermined its image hence affecting public trust and confidence.

Under the Judiciary Strategic Plan V (JSIP) V FY 2020/2021 – 2024/2025, the Judiciary sought to improve public awareness and its image. To actualize this pillar, the Judiciary has carried out and continues to carry out many activities including radio/Television talk shows, barazas, development and dissemination of information communicational materials and court open days.

Court Open Days (COD) are interactive engagements organized at a given Court as a platform for the stakeholders, court users and the public to engage with the Judiciary. COD is one of the deliberate efforts by the Judiciary to strengthen accountability, scale up stakeholder engagements, sensitise court users and obtain feedback on services provided by the Judiciary. COD in the Judiciary is a best practice benchmarked from Denmark where for years from 1996 to 2016 many Judicial Officers particularly, Magistrates Grade One were trained for a period of one month. In 2016, the Anti-Corruption Division held its first COD. The event was very successful. At that time, I was both the Chief Magistrate and Acting Assistant Registrar at the Court.

Today, COD's have been institutionalised in the Judiciary and since 2020, 57 of



The Chief Justice inspecting the Uganda Prisons Services stall during the Kitgum Chief Magistrates Court Open Day. Looking on is the Head of the Gulu High Court Circuit, Justice Phillip Odoki, Chief Registrar HW Sarah Langa Siu and other stakeholders

them have been held at different courts across the country. Some of the courts that have held COD include High Courts of Arua, Kabale, Jinja, Mbale, Mubende, Soroti, Mpigi, Masindi, Gulu, Fort Portal; Chief Magistrates Courts in Kitgum, Nwoya, Nabweru, Kumi, Sironko, Bubulo, Entebbe, Mayuge, Katakwi, Ibanda, Bushenyi, Moyo, Adjumani, Luwero, Mityana and Rukungiri. CODs have been held in Aleré and Kyaka Refugee Camps, and other Magistrate Grade I Courts that include Amuru, Kole, Nsangi, Kagango/Sheema, Bududa, among others.

Objectives of COD

The key objectives of COD are to demystify court processes, receive feedback on judicial services and improve stakeholder engagements. The COD also serves as an anti – corruption intervention according court users a forum to openly ask

questions, seek clarity on the kind of justice they receive and where necessary make proposals for improved performance.

At the COD the following activities take place:

1. Sensitisation and demonstration of different court processes and procedures like Small Claims Procedure (SCP); Plea Bargaining, Mediation, Civil and Criminal trial processes, bail refunds procedures etc
2. The different justice actors like Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), Uganda Police Force, Uganda Prisons, Advocates explain their mandates and roles in the administration of justices
3. The public and court users freely interact and give feedback to the courts and other justice law and order sector institutions in their jurisdiction.



4. The Courts demystify the services offered by the Judiciary
5. The public and court users get to meet and know the Judicial Officers and staff of the Judiciary as well as those of other justice institutions
6. Exhibition by the Judiciary and other justice actors to showcase their services and further clarify their roles to the public
7. At Judiciary owned premises, a tree of justice is always planted

Participants at COD

COD are usually attended by the different justice actors like police, prisons, advocates, ODPP, Attorneys from MOJCA, Civil Society Organisations, Probation and Community Service Officers and Legal Aid Providers. Others include political and technical officers from the Districts and Cities like Resident District Commissioners, LC Chairpersons of different levels, Religious Leaders, litigants, traditional and cultural leaders, the media, business communities and the public. When co-funded development partners also attend.

The COD are usually presided over by members of the Top Management- Chief Justice, Deputy Chief Justice, Principal Judge and Chief Registrar. On some occasions, Resident Judges of the Circuits preside over the event.

During some of the COD held, the Chief Justice, Deputy Chief Justice and Principal Judge have had this to say:

“The COD is an opportunity for the Justice service providers – the Courts, the Police, the State Attorneys, the Prisons, the Advocates and the Legal Aid service providers – to freely interact with the consumers of the justice services and together be able to identify the bottlenecks to justice delivery and agree on tailor-made solutions to these challenges. Our grand aim is to enhance access to justice services to our clients across the divide in order to foster peaceful societies and nurture socio-economic development in the country,”

– Chief Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny – Dollo while presiding COD at Amuru Magistrates Court on August 21, 2023.

The Chief Justice further stated that *“for the Judiciary to achieve its grand agenda of transforming through the provision of meaningful justice service to the people, there is a need to have a visible and functional Judiciary within reach of our people throughout the country. More importantly, the Judiciary must be true to its duty to do justice to all manner of people, without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. The Judiciary must be guided by the principles of integrity, impartiality and zero tolerance to any vice that negates the requisite principles for rendering justice,”*

The Deputy Chief Justice- Hon. Justice Richard Buteera while presiding over the COD at Kumi Chief Magistrates Court on March 24, 2023 had this to say. *“COD is now an important occasion on the Judiciary calendar of activities. It is the day that Judicial Officers, State Attorneys, Members of the Bar, Police, other Justice Actors and all the Security and Governance Programme / Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) plus Court Staff, come together to interact with the people they serve. At the end of this interaction feedback is taken positively to improve service delivery of judicial and justice services to the people of Uganda for whom we are.”*

The Deputy Chief Justice further underscored that importance of customer care and reminded the judicial officers that they are servants of the people. He stated *“every time a court user comes to court for assistance, let us be quick to make them feel at home. The attitude with which we attend to them should reflect the true image of servanthood. In any case, the people we serve are our bosses.”*

Benefits of COD

There are several benefits of COD including:

1. Bridging the gap between justice providers and justice seekers. COD brings justice actors together with the seekers hence bridging the barriers that ordinarily exist among them.



The Deputy Chief Justice addressing court users and members of the public at the Ntungamo Chief Magistrates Court Open Day.



The Principal Judge presided over the Sironko Chief Magistrates Court Open Day



2. The public and court users get sensitised on court procedures, processes and roles of the various justice actors are clearly distinguished. For example, a one Anena Margaret, at Amuru Court said “I thank God for this interaction. Now I know the work of Police, State Attorneys and Courts. Thank you for the open days”
3. Gives a human face to the Courts. The public is able to meet the members of the Top Management and the Judicial Officers and Staff in there are. For example, in Sheema a Scovia Arigye, Sheema said “I have really benefitted a lot. It is the first time that I have seen the Principal Judge and I got an opportunity to ask him a question and he personally answered.”
4. Distinguish identity of judicial officers, staff of the courts and other justice actors plus masqueraders and “bush lawyers”. In Katakwi for example a woman who had held out as a staff of the court for years was exposed. It turned out that all the support staff at the court were male.
5. Stakeholder views on key justice needs and issues are obtained for action by Judiciary and other stakeholder. In Kagango Court, a court user, Musa Mugulusi said, “when we raised the bad vices that were at our court in Kagango, there was a big change and we were helped”
6. First hand appreciation of the justice needs by Top Management. During the COD at Kabale High Court on November 14, 2023, the Principal Judge Hon. Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija said “the feedback we get from you is important because it helps the Judiciary to identify areas for improvement to meet your justice needs. Our vision as the Judiciary is Justice For All. We acknowledge that there have been obstacles along the way. With the help of your feedback, we now understand most of the challenges you are facing

regarding access to justice.”

7. It contributes significantly to the improvement of the Judiciary image through people’s feedback on our services consumed by them

Common challenges/issues raised at COD

Some of the feedback that the Judiciary has received through COD have included –

1. long distances travelled by litigants to access courts;
2. inadequate number of judicial officers and support staff in some courts;
3. absenteeism, late coming and leaving office early by some judicial officers and other staff of the judiciary;
4. bad attitude and lack of customer care by some of our officers;
5. long periods taken at court registries without being attended to; some cases taking long in court before completion and some judicial officers taking longer periods than is necessary to pronounce decisions;
6. allegations of corruption against some court officers; allegations of bias against some judicial officers;
7. misconduct by some court bailiffs
8. absence of prosecutors in many courts; absence of advocates and legal aid services providers in many parts of the country;
9. advocates overcharging clients, among others.



The Author; HW Sarah Langa Siu, Chief Registrar.

The First National Court Open Day

Today Monday 15th April 2024, history is being made, the Judiciary holds its First National Court Open Day. The theme is “a people centered approach to justice”. This theme is inspired by Article 126. The event brings together the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, the seven High Court Divisions – Civil Division, Criminal Division, Anti-Corruption Division, International Crimes Division, Commercial Court, Family Division and Land Division; the Industrial Court; the Inspectorate of Courts and the Judicial Training Institute. Several justice actors like the ODPP, Judicial Service Commission, Police, Prisons and many more are participating at this event.

The Hon. Chief Justice is officiating the event whose organising Committee was chaired by the Hon. Principal Judge. The event was co-funded by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to whom we are grateful.

Our expected output from this event is that:

1. enhanced public awareness of the mandate of the Judiciary; its procedures and processes as well as that of the other justice institutions
2. enhanced public trust, confidence and understanding of the Judiciary generally
3. strengthened partnerships with state and non-state actors
4. reduced gap between the Courts and our users.

Appeal to the Public and Court Users

Always participate in this activity to understand your Courts and use the occasion to learn as much and also obtain useful material for your further reading. Together we can improve our Courts to serve our justice needs better. ■



25th Annual Judges' Conference: Judges agree to a people-centered approach to justice

In a move to strengthen the administration of justice to the satisfaction of the public, the Judiciary has embraced a people-centered approach to justice. This was the theme of the 25th Annual Judges Conference held at the Kampala Serena Hotel in Kampala between February 5 - 8, 2024.

The theme was drawn from Article 126 (1) of the Constitution which provides that judicial power is derived from the people and shall be exercised by the courts in the name of the people and in conformity with the law and with the values, norms and aspirations of the people.

Opening the Conference, President Yoweri Museveni in his speech delivered by the Vice President, H.E. Maj. (Rtd) Jessica Alupo commended the Judiciary for adopting a people-centered approach to justice stressing that it is important to involve the people in the administration of justice.

President Museveni remarked that justice will be meaningful and people-centered

if in every case the Judges handle, if they apply the provisions of Article 126 of the Constitution, adhere fully to the principles of the Judicial Code of Conduct and stand by the judicial oath which requires them to administer justice without fear, ill-will or affection.

President Museveni, who was represented by the Vice President, said the Government will continue to support the Judiciary to realise its transformation agenda as it is key in fostering democracy and rule of law.

Museveni also asked the Judges to promote mediation and reconciliation in administration of justice saying this is the African justice system.

The Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny

- Dollo, commended the Government for enhancing the Judiciary's budget which has enabled the Judiciary to recruit more judicial officers, create new High Court Circuits among others that has led to reduction of case backlog. The Judiciary budget was enhanced from sh199b to sh392b this financial year.

"When I took over office in 2020, the budget of the Judiciary was sh199b but when we made our case, the following year, our budget was literally doubled. We are not yet there but we believe we should get sh800b and if we achieve this, the Judiciary of Uganda will do wonders and it will be possible for any judicial officer to dispose of any matter brought before them in less than a year," the Chief Justice noted.



He appealed to the Judges to promote Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) which he said is not only the original African justice system but will greatly impact the fight against case backlog.

Delivering the highlights of the keynote speech at the Conference, Dr. Livingstone Sewanyana, the Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI) said a people-centered approach to justice is a magic bullet to effective delivery of justice.

Dr. Sewanyana underscored the need for the Judiciary to have a paradigm shift to a more transformative, user-friendly based approach that puts the users at the center of justice to ensure access to justice for all.

He observed that the transformative approach to justice delivery recognises that justice is not only a legal question but it should holistically counter inequalities and discrimination, address power balances, put people at the center, question traditional assumptions, and ultimately guarantee justice as an undeniable public good.

Dr. Sewanyana said the Judiciary can only realise people-centered justice if it puts people and their justice needs at the center of justice systems.

He said a people-centered access to justice is a game changer because it has the potential of bridging the justice gap.

Further, Dr. Sewanyana said the people-centered approach to justice provides an opportunity to identify, measure, and understand the justice gap hence ensuring equity and fairness.

“This approach is holistic as it advocates for the systemic and integrated approach to address the justice gap. Going beyond the traditional approach of focusing on more



The Vice President, H.E. Maj. (Rtd) Jessica Alupo, delivered the President's speech.



Human Rights Activist, Dr. Livingstone Sewanyana, delivered the Keynote Presentation.

lawyers, prosecutors and courts, it brings about shifts in mind set, delving deeper into transforming the justice eco system to be service-oriented,” Dr. Sewanyana noted.

He added that the biggest challenge for the Judiciary in justice delivery is how to ensure that justice systems deliver fair, and acceptable outcomes that enable people to move forward with their lives, their work and their businesses.

Besides adopting the people-centered approach to justice, Sewanyana rallied Judiciary to strengthen use of alternative methods of dispute resolution such as mediation and arbitration for delivery of substantial justice.

He remarked that the use of digital technologies to develop mobile applications



Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo.

for the public that provide information on court proceedings, processes and procedures is inevitable.

A 2021 World Bank study indicates that only 32 % of people experiencing a justice problem report that it is resolved in a satisfactory way and only 7% use a court or some other form of tribunal while 8% get advice from a lawyer or other professional.

The Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Norbert Mao implored the Judges to accept public criticism and also work towards enhancing public confidence in the judicial system.

“The Judiciary has to be Independent but this does not mean that the Judiciary is free from criticism except that the criticism should be responsible and fair,” Norbert Mao said.

Supreme Court Justice and the Chairperson of the National Organizing Committee of the Judges' Conference, Mike Chibita, noted that the specific objectives of the Conference included sharing the views and experiences, securing feedback on the implementation of recent legal reforms and enactments, discussing strategies on how to blend the formal justice system with ADR mechanisms and to draw insights and share best practices on case backlog reduction strategies. ■



New Law Year 2024: Chief Justice accentuates cooperation between the Bar and the Bench

In the administration of justice, the Bar and the Bench play a vital role as they share a common duty in ensuring that justice is administered properly and effectively.

Talking to this line at the opening of the New Law Year 2024 at the High Court in Kampala on February 9, 2024, the Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo, called upon members of the legal fraternity to collaborate with the Judiciary noting that the administration of justice cannot be successful unless there is unity between the Bar and the Bench.

With the growing trend where some lawyers have made it a habit to attack Judges because of their decisions, the Chief Justice said while the Judiciary welcomes and appreciates criticism, it must be constructive intended to help judicial officers to realise that they could have done something wrong.

He said abusing judicial officers because of their decisions is unacceptable.

“

On Judiciary performance, the Chief Justice disclosed that in 2023, case registration increased to 269,595 cases from 239,598 that were registered in 2022 indicating growing confidence in the Judiciary.

“If there are issues, we can discuss them and don't be surprised we can agree with you on all of them but if you begin by attacking me, we are going to spend the entire day fighting because I will fire back. My plea to my brothers and sisters in

the legal profession, let us have decorum, let us build the Judiciary together because it is your marketplace where you carry out your professional trade. Let us respect one another. Let us not damage this country as if we can run to another planet,” the Chief Justice said.

He advised members of the legal fraternity to fully embrace all Judiciary functions saying it is not wise for lawyers to boycott them. Adding that the Judiciary will not be intimidated by any insult or render justice out of fear.

On Judiciary performance, the Chief Justice disclosed that in 2023, case registration increased to 269,595 cases from 239,598 that were registered in 2022 indicating growing confidence in the Judiciary.

In regard to case backlog, the Chief Justice





said it had reduced to 43,161 cases. “This gives us hope that in spite of a huge rise in case registration, the backlog trend is declining steadily and systemically,” the Chief Justice noted.

He revealed that the priorities for the Judiciary this year include commissioning of the appellate court buildings, developing the judgment writing tool, rolling out ECCMIS to more courts, enhancing the pecuniary jurisdiction of magistrates’ court and promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the administration of justice among others.

The Attorney General, Kiryowa Kiwanuka also the Head of the Bar stressed that the three arms of Government owe to the citizens to work together to realise their aspirations as stipulated in the Constitution.

“Working together might never mean or lead to interference in each other’s function. It is important that as we plan for the country together, we cooperate with one another to ensure that no branch of Government is disadvantaged in its operations. Whatever we do, it must be done for the benefit of the country as a whole and we must support each other to achieve these goals,” Kiryowa stated.

He observed that for the bar-bench to work together there must be mutual respect from the two institutions.

Kiryowa also advocated for relative uniformity in court decisions, awards and sentences and for timely disposal of cases and delivery of judgment.

In his remarks read by the Vice President Jessica Alupo at the function, President Yoweri Museveni implored judicial officers to acquire knowledge and skills in the emerging sophisticated crimes arising from technological advancement and globalisation of human activities.



Vice President. H.E. Maj (Rtd) Jessica Alupo.



Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo.



Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Nobert Mao.

Museveni pointed out that crimes such as money laundering, terrorism financing, trafficking in persons, smuggling in wildlife and wildlife products requires judicial officers, state attorneys, police officers, prisons staff and lawyers to build capacity and acquire more knowledge to ably tackle them.

Museveni saluted the Judiciary for innovative mechanisms such as Mediation,

Plea Bargain, Small Claims Procedure, Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS), among others which he said are good interventions to ease access to justice by the *wanainchi* (common people) and to promote harmony among the people.

The President said the Government will continue to support the Judiciary towards the realisation of its transformation agenda hinged on a people-centered approach to justice.

President Museveni guided that the transformation agenda of the Judiciary should be about taking services nearer to our people.

Uganda Law Society President, Mr. Bernard Oundo, said all efforts should be focused on creating an enabling practicing environment that promotes the rule of law and independence of the Judiciary.

Oundo said the central function that the legal professional must perform is nothing less than the administration of justice.

“We will focus this year as ULS to strengthen our bar-bench forum that we will be able to meet on a bi-annual basis to discuss the challenges we face in the administration of justice,” he said.

Oundo remarked that there cannot be a meaningful people-centered approach to justice if justice seekers cannot believe that the court can adjudicate cases impartially and without external pressure.

He noted that a justice seeker must have confidence that he will have a fair opportunity to state his case to a fair-minded Judge.

Oundo said ULS is committed to ensuring that its members act professionally and ethically. ■



The Chief Justice, Alfonso Chigamoy Owiny – Dollo, flanked by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs at the launch of the 2022/23 Judiciary Annual Performance Report on October 20, 2023.

Highlights of the Financial Year 2022/23 Annual Performance Report

At the end of last year, the Chief Justice Alfonso Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo presented Judiciary's Annual Performance Report for financial year (FY) 2022/23. Here are the insights:

Government of Uganda funding

In terms of funding, the Chief Justice explained that over the last three financial years, the Judiciary received an increment in its budget allocation from Shs199billion for FY 2020/21 to Shs376.9billion for the FY 2021/22 and to Shs381.6billion for FY 2022/23. During the budget execution, Justice Owiny - Dollo said, a supplementary budget of Shs1.6billion was received leading to a revised budget of Shs383.2billion.

Recruitment

In line with the Judiciary's transformation agenda, and supported by the increase in funding, the Chief Justice said that the institution has been able to enhance its human resource capacity over the last two Financial Years. The Chief Justice noted that a total of 743 personnel were received into the Judiciary Service, including the newly recruited and those appointed on promotion to bridge the staffing gaps and improve service delivery.

Looking back at FY 2021/22, the Judiciary

started with 376 Judicial Officers. Some Chief Magistrates were caretaking between two to six Chief Magisterial Areas. For instance, the Fort Portal Chief Magistrate was operating six magisterial areas while the ones of Soroti and Lira were each running five Chief Magisterial Areas. "I am pleased to report that today we have a total of 649 Judicial Officers all strategically deployed. The Judicial Officers to population ratio as therefore improved to 1:70,203 in 2023 from 1:81,724 in 2022 and 1:114,326 in 2020," the Chief Justice said.




Most of the newly recruited or promoted staff have been duly inducted and given sufficient orientation and required skills to effectively execute judicial work. The Judiciary continues to conduct trainings to enhance the capacity of Judicial Officers to handle cases in key emerging areas. “The trainings conducted mainly targeted Adjudication of Communication Related Offences, Information Technology and Tax Systems, Asset Recovery, Trafficking in Persons, Survivor Support and Management of Victims of SGBV Cases, Cyber Crime and Electronic Evidence, Disability Rights, Amendments in the Electricity Regulatory Act, Insolvency Law and Climate Justice,” Chief Justice, Alfonso Chigamoy Owiny- Dollo noted.

Case disposal

He noted that the Judiciary has experienced steady growth in the number of completed cases; 266,323 cases in FY 2022/23 from 205,967 cases in FY 2021/22 and 156,875 cases in FY 2020/21. The Chief Justice, emphasised the improved speed in the disposal of cases—noting a disposal rate of 63.01% in FY 2022/23 was achieved as compared to 55% in FY 2021/22 and 49% in FY 2020/21. “The average time taken (in days) from filing to disposal of cases has also reduced significantly with a three-weeks’ faster completion in FY 2022/23 as opposed to the previous years.” He cited a survey done by Avocats Sans Frontières in 2023 which showed the percentage of court users rating confidence in courts has increased from 61% to 71%—attributing this to an overall good performance.

A total of 266,323 cases out of a total caseload of 422,672 were completed. The breakdown of the caseload indicates 128,652 cases brought forward from FY 2021/22 and 294,020 of the freshly registered cases in FY 2022/23.

The Chief Justice pointed out that the Magistrates Grade 1 recorded the highest



Overall, courts closed with a pending caseload of 156,349 cases, of which 42,960 were backlog. This, he said, accounted for 27.48% of cases as backlog from 32% in FY 2020/21, which translates to 4.52 % reduction in backlog.

disposal rates of 134,583 cases followed by Chief Magistrates with 35,108 cases which was as a result of highest staffing level of Magistrates Grade 1 (292) as compared to Chief Magistrates (77) and Grade II’s (22) **as of June 30 2023.** “As a result of the increased staffing at various court levels, there was a visible increase in productivity, especially at High Court and Magistrate Courts level,” he said.

Criminal cases were the most registered and also completed. The rise of criminal cases can be attributed to population growth and urbanisation, which set challenges for unemployment and survival instincts, giving rise to a higher crime rate. On the other hand, international crimes were the least registered and completed.

Overall, courts closed with a pending caseload of 156,349 cases, of which 42,960 were backlog. This, he said, accounted for 27.48% of cases as backlog from 32% in FY 2020/21, which translates to 4.52 % reduction in backlog. “The age of uncompleted cases in the courts has declined over the last three financial years, with only 14.25% of uncompleted cases ageing five years and older as at end of June 2023, compared to 16.73% as at end of June 2022,” he said.

Operationalisation of six High Court Circuits

During the Financial Year, the Chief Justice said significant efforts were made to improve access to justice services and to combat case backlog in Uganda by operationalising six High Court Circuits. High Courts of Luweero, Iganga, Tororo, Rukungiri, Moroto and Hoima had been non-operational since their establishment in 2016. But these were officially launched, bringing the total number of High Court Circuits to 20. The importance of these new Circuits in enhancing access to justice for residents in these regions was stressed during their launch. Justice Owiny- Dollo promised transparent, fair and efficient legal process that guarantees trust and confidence in the judicial system.

At the High Court level, the Chief Justice said that the Judiciary embarked on an exercise to increase the coverage and proximity of High Court circuits across the country for effective operation and delivery of justice to the people of Uganda.

A taskforce was constituted in February 2023, which started consultations in selected regions and Districts—focusing on various parameters including the distance, caseload, availability of basic facilities, population, proximity with other justice institutions, and availability of land.

Accordingly, the Judicature (Designation of High Court Circuits) Instrument, 2023 was reviewed and approved by the Judiciary Council for gazetting, at its meeting on September 28, 2023 to help alleviate the burden of case backlog. The Instrument creates 38 High Court Circuits.

Magistrates Courts

In line with the Judiciary Transformation Agenda, the Magisterial Areas Instrument is being revised to, inter alia, establish a Chief Magistrate’s Court for every District



The Chief Justice cutting a ribbon to commemorate the commissioning of the Mukono High Court Building as stakeholders look on, on May 11, 2023.



Patongo Magistrate's Court is at the finishing stage with painting and tiling works ongoing.

in Uganda and at least one Magistrate Grade I Court for each county constituency. This effort is geared towards enhancing access to court services across the country by reducing distances to the courts; consequently cutting the cost of justice and unwarranted case backlog.

Furthermore, Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny – Dollo added that pecuniary jurisdiction of Chief Magistrates is limited to civil suits whose value does not exceed Shs50million while Magistrates Grade I are limited to suits not exceeding Shs20million. Considering the high inflationary levels, population growth and increasing growth in the economy, the Magistrates have very few cases they can handle, which has

increased backlog at the High Court level.

As a result, the Judiciary has constituted a taskforce to conduct a study on proposals for the enhancement of the jurisdiction for Magistrates Courts to further justify the need for the revision. The team reviewed the Magistrates Court Act Cap 16, in light of the reasons for enhancement of the jurisdiction. It also undertook a nationwide statistical analysis of cases that are before all the High Court Circuits and Magistrates Courts to establish the impact of the amendment on the number of cases that would move from the High Courts to the Magistrates Courts. “The findings were adopted by the Law Reform Committee and the process of amendment is being

managed by the Office of the Attorney General,” the Chief Justice said.

Infrastructure

With support from the Government, the Judiciary was able to construct and maintain some of its buildings. There is tremendous progress with the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal buildings that are in final stages of completion. The current status is as follows: Soroti High Court is at second-floor walling, Rukungiri High Court is at the plastering stage, Tororo High Court is pending approval from the Solicitor General, Alebtong Chief Magistrates Court is at the roofing and finishing stage, Lyantonde Chief Magistrates Court is at the plastering and fitting of windows stage, Budaka Chief Magistrates Court is at the painting stage, tiling and external works, Abim Grade I Court Block A is at the roofing stage while Block B is at the substructure level, Karenga Grade 1 Court is at the roofing stage, Patongo is at the finishing stage with painting and tiling works ongoing, the rehabilitation of Nabilatuk Grade 1 Court is ongoing and is at the painting stage, extension of Moroto Chief Magistrates Court is at painting stage.

In addition, plans are underway to have Regional Courts of Appeal so that appeal cases from High Courts are resolved at the regional level. “This will reduce the cost of accessing justice,” Justice Owiny- Dollo said.

As per the Administration of Justice Programme, the Chief Justice said, they will ensure that institutions under the Programme such as Office of Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), Uganda Police and Uganda Prisons, Legal Aid Service Providers (like Legal Aid Clinics and Justice Centres Uganda) are supported to expand their services so that cases are expeditiously handled. ■



Above: The recently completed Supreme Court and Court of Appeal court buildings in Kampala.

Below: Judiciary Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana outlining Judiciary's priorities

Judiciary Priorities for 2024

1. Shift to the Appellate Court buildings

The Supreme Court and Court of Appeal will be operating from the new buildings.

2. Complete the ongoing constructions

The Judiciary plans to complete the ongoing constructions:

- Soroti and Rukungiri High Court buildings
- Alebtong, Budaka and Lyatonde Chief Magistrate Court buildings

- Abim, Patongo and Karenga Magistrate Grade 1 Court buildings

3. Start the construction of new courts and institutional houses

- Mbarara and Gulu Court of Appeal buildings (Phase 1)
- Tororo, Hoima and Mpigi High Court buildings (Phase 1)
- Bunyangabo, Amolatar, Nyarushanje, Bubulo and Rakai Chief Magistrate Courts (Phase 1)
- Busembatia, Katine and Adwari Magistrate Grade One Court (Phase 1)
- Institutional houses at Moyo, Karenga, Bukwo and Buhweju.

4. Renovate old and dilapidated court buildings

The Judiciary plans to renovate:

- High Court building Kampala (Judiciary Headquarters)
- Arua High Court
- Six (6) Chief

Magistrate Courts of Bushenyi, Kalangala, Kabale, Bundibugyo, Busia and Apac.

- Two (2) Magistrate Grade One (1) Courts of Koboko and Paidha

5. Procure more transport equipment for judicial officers

- 74 vehicles will be procured for Judicial Officers and supervision (Judges of the High Court (10), Deputy Registrars (10), Chief Magistrates (40) and Magistrates Grade 1 (10), 3 vehicles procured for field supervision and 1 Minibus (14 Seater)
- Two (2) boats will be procured for courts in island areas of Buvuma and Kalangala
- 50 motorcycles will be procured for Process Service for Courts

6. Provide for alternative sources of power to courts in remote areas

Courts in remote areas face frequent load-shading which interrupts Court operations and thus affecting the quality of judicial service delivery.

The Judiciary will install solar systems in 12 Courts of Kaberamaido, Nebbi, Nakaseke, Kole, Nabweru, Bukedea, Busia, Paidha G1, Mityana, Namayingo, Kamwenge and Buhweju.

7. Provide furniture in court halls and chambers of judicial officers





Interior: The Chief Justice's Chamber.



One of the courtrooms.

Majority of the Magistrates Courts lack furniture for Court halls. These courts are forced to borrow furniture from Local Councils to operate. The Judiciary plans to procure furniture for:

- Six (6) High Courts (Civil, Land, Anti-corruption, International Crimes, Mbarara and Gulu)
- 12 new Justices
- Five (5) Registrar
- 27 lower courts

8. Acquire land for the construction of courts

The Judiciary is in the process of acquiring 40 land titles in areas earmarked for the construction of court buildings.

9. Automation plans

The Judiciary will continue to foster the use of ICT in adjudication of cases. Specifically, this will be done through:

9.1 ECCMIS

- Maintaining ECCMIS functional at eight (8) courts of Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Commercial Division, Land Division, Anti-corruption Division, Civil Division, Luwero HCT and Mengo CM.
- The ECCMIS Rules are under development and before the Rules Committee, and probably they will soon be approved. Thereafter, ECCMIS will be rolled out in a phased manner as show in the tables below.

Cluster Two courts

No.	Court Name	February, 2024
1.	Criminal Division High Court	Pending
2.	International Crimes Division High Court	Pending
3.	Buganda Road Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
4.	Standards, Utilities and Wildlife Chief Magistrates Court.	Pending

Cluster Three courts

No.	Court Name	July, 2024
1.	Family Division High Court	Pending
2.	Makindye Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
3.	Nakawa Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
4.	LDC Magistrates Court	Pending

Cluster Four courts

No.	Court Name	December, 2024
1.	Entebbe Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
2.	Nabweru Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
3.	Kiira Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
4.	Kasangati Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
5.	Wakiso Chief Magistrates Court	Pending
6.	Kajjansi Chief Magistrates Court	Pending

9.2 Video Conferencing Systems

Acquisition and installation of three (3) Video Conferencing Systems at three (3) High Courts (including their Main Prisons: - Rukungiri, Mukono and International Crimes Division)

9.3 Court Recording and Transcription

Systems

Acquisition and installation of two (2) Court Recording and Transcription Systems at two (2) High Courts including: - Tororo and Bushenyi High Courts.

9.4 Complete the development of the Judgement Writing Tool.



How Many Courts were Constructed In 2023?

1. Constructed courts

a) The construction of the Supreme Court building is complete, while the Court of Appeal building is at 99% completion. The completion of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal buildings alone will save the government UGX 6billion previously spent on renting premises for the two (2) courts.

The Courts await to be commissioned by H.E the President.

b) The construction of Mukono High Court, Butambala, Mayuge and Kamwenge Chief Magistrate Courts, and Kole, Namayingo and Buhweju Justice Centres was completed.

c) Construction is still ongoing for two (2) High Court buildings: Soroti is on the second floor, and Rukungiri is at the painting stage.

d) Construction is still ongoing for three (3) Chief Magistrates Courts:

- Alebtong is at plastering stage;
- Lyantonde is at plastering and fitting of windows; and,
- Budaka is at the painting, tiling, and external works stage.

e) Construction is ongoing for three (3) Magistrate Grade 1 Courts:

- Abim is at roofing stage;
- Karenga is at painting stage; and
- Patongo is at finishing stage.

2. Renovated Court buildings

The Judiciary completed renovation of 15 Court buildings including Commercial Division, Mubende High Court & CM, Mbale High Court & CM, Gulu High Court & CM, Soroti CM, Kamuli CM, Tororo CM, Kumi CM, Nakasongola CM, Pader CM, Katakwi CM, Otuke G1, Kalongo G1 and Nakawa G1.

Coverage of Operational Courts Across the Country

1. Supreme Court

2. Court of Appeal/Constitutional court

3. High Court Divisions – 7/7 (100%)

- The Family Division.
- Land Division:
- Civil Division:
- The Commercial Court.
- Criminal Division
- Anti-Corruption Division
- International Crimes Division

4. High Court Circuits – 23/34 (68%)

Arua, Fort Portal, Gulu, Hoima, Iganga, Jinja, Kabale, Lira, Luwero, Masaka, Masindi, Mbarara, Mbale, Moroto, Mpigi, Mubende, Mukono, Rukungiri, Soroti and Tororo. Recently added High Courts circuits include: Bushenyi, Kiboga and Kitgum

5. Chief Magistrate Courts – 82/83 (99%)



Namayingo Magistrate's Court was completed.



Karenga Magistrate's Court at the roofing stage.



6. Magistrate Grade 1 Courts – 139/398 (35%) The proportion of gazetted areas with operational courts is at 70.15%

NOTE:

1. Court of Appeal also holds out of station sessions in various regions across the country to bring services near to the public
2. The Judiciary is also planning to operationalise Regional Courts of Appeal starting with Mbarara and Gulu.
3. High Court Circuits hold out of station sessions in the areas of their jurisdiction
4. The Judiciary holds special court sessions in refugee camps. These sessions hear both civil and criminal matters arising from the refugee and host communities.
5. The Judiciary is in the process of Re-gazetting of Magisterial Areas and designation of more High Court Circuits.

How Much Bail has Been Refunded?

Bail Refund Summary FY 2022/23

MONTH	BAIL COLLECTED	BAIL REFUNDED
July	453,023,300	140,045,000
August	559,019,760	38,100,000
September	521936900	141,790,000
October	526,673,200	436,200,000
November	478,630,000	0
December	527,390,000	111,850,000
January	391,170,000	286,576,000
February	527,020,500	0
March	768,793,000	313,150,000
April	459922805	127,990,000
May	521444900	119,600,000
June	454,343,300	128,100,000
Total	6,189,367,665	1,843,401,000

BAIL REFUND SUMMARY FY 2023/24 (July –November 2023)

	BAIL COLLECTED	BAIL REFUNDED
Total	1,650,506,500	756,880,000

Major Challenges Encountered

a) Inadequate manpower

Whereas the Judiciary has recruited a number of staff during the past two years, the numbers are still insufficient to match the justice demand. Currently, 46% of the approved staff structure is filled.

b) Inadequacies amongst some of the key justice Agencies

The other justice service Agencies such as the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Uganda Police Force (CID), the Judicial Service Commission and the Office of the Attorney General, among others, still have low human resource capacity, have not increased their presence across the country, and providing sufficient tools for their workforce. This has inevitably frustrated justice service delivery and made it difficult to banish case backlog from Courts.

c) Inadequate transport

The Judiciary still faces a challenge of inadequate transport equipment to facilitate the work of judicial officers especially those at the lower bench and in hard-to-reach areas like the islands of Koome, Buvuma and Kalangala. The Judiciary is in the process of acquiring boats for island areas.

d) Few institutional houses

Lack of Institutional houses to cater for accommodation in hard to reach/stay areas such as Kalangala, Buvuma Island, Bulisa, Buyende, Abim, Karenga, Napak, Bukwo, Nakapiripirit, Moyo & Buhweju.

Message to the public

The Judiciary is committed to ensure that justice is accessible to all. Our goal is to improve business processes in the administration of justice.

Therefore, we are implementing several measures to make the Judiciary more accessible to the public, to mention but a few:

- Operationalising new courts across the country
- Increasing the coverage of automated services
- Promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (Mediation)
- Focus on quick disposal of commercial and land disputes
- We have put in place channels that allow you to provide feedback and complaints about our services (Call Toll Free lines: **0800 111 900/0800 225 587**)

All interventions strive to empower people and build trust and confidence in the justice system. ■



The Court of Appeal is committed to dispensing justice for all - DCJ Richard Buteera

By Rose Ampurira

Justice Richard Buteera is the Deputy Chief Justice of Uganda and the head of the Court of Appeal/Constitutional Court, a position he assumed in September 2020. He shares his plan and vision for the Court.

Tell us about a day in the life of the Deputy Chief Justice?

This is an office that comes with responsibilities of being an administrator, being Deputy to the Chief Justice. It has administrative roles in respect of the whole Judiciary in terms of policy, in terms of matters that arise as to how the Judiciary is run, matters of budgeting for operations, and addressing both policy-related and non-policy matters, including the handling of disputes.

In addition to these administrative duties, the Deputy Chief Justice heads the Court of Appeal and the Constitutional Court. This also involves administrative roles within these courts and legal roles as a Justice, just like any other Justice at the Court of Appeal.

The Deputy Chief Justice sits on a panel of five Justices (heading the Panel) for Constitutional cases, participates in the hearing of a case, like the other Justices, and writes a judgment. So, as head of panel, Deputy Chief Justice will have to administer the panel handling the case and come out with a judgment, whether it be a single judgment or multiple judgments specific to that case.

Generally, those are the roles that define

what the Deputy Chief Justice does on a day-to-day basis.

As the Head of the Court of Appeal, what unique challenges do you face in handling cases that come before you?

The main challenge is personnel. Currently, the Court of Appeal has 12 Justices (conclusion of the appointment process of three Justices is ongoing), while the Constitutional provision mandates a total of 15 justices, inclusive of the Deputy Chief Justice. Consequently, the workload is distributed among the 12 justices, who must fulfill the duties originally designated for 15. Of the 12 Justices, one has been sick for the most of 2023. Another is currently engaged with responsibilities at the East African Court of Justice in Arusha [Tanzania] for several months. This situation contributes to a heavy workload.

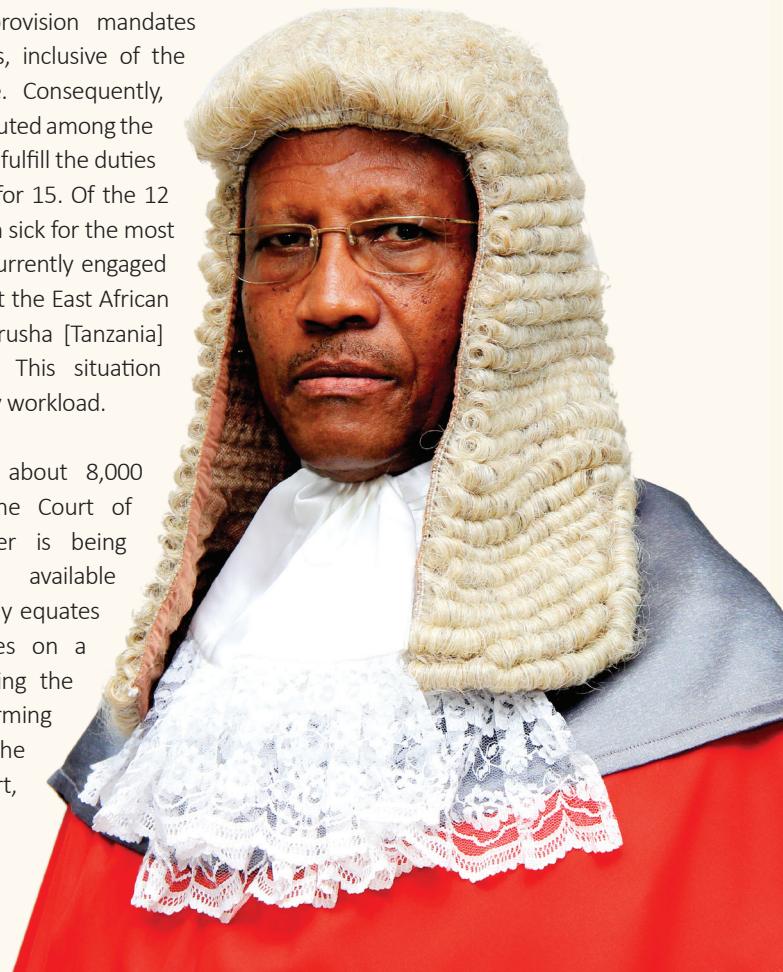
Currently, we have about 8,000 pending cases at the Court of Appeal. This number is being managed by the available Justices, which roughly equates to around 10 Judges on a daily basis. Considering the requirement of forming panels of five for the Constitutional Court,



there are two such panels. Similarly, for the Court of Appeal, where three-Judge panels are needed, only three panels are available to constitute a Court.

It is important to remember that all appeals from the High Court end up at the Court of Appeal.

Judiciary currently has 81 Judges of the High Court and all appeals arising from their decisions to come to the Court of





Deputy Chief Justice (2nd L) with Justices Frederick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende (L), Christopher Gashirabake (3rd L) and Oscar Kihika (R) during a court session at Mbale High Court.

Appeal, that has only three panels to handle these appeals. Essentially, there are only three panels available to address appeals from 81 courts, and this limitation is the root cause of the accumulation of these case numbers.

The proposed solution, now approved by Parliament, is to increase the number of Justices from 15 to 35. Once this expansion takes effect, we shall certainly see a change at the Court of Appeal. We are also looking at not only increasing numbers, by establishing Court of Appeal branches upcountry aiming to decentralise case hearings. If we can have four branches of the Court of Appeal, that would reduce the volume of cases.

The others are the problems of funding the Court appropriately to do its work and other issues of resourcing the Court in terms of facilities that it needs.

For now, we are happy that we shall be moving to new premises of the Court of Appeal where there is adequate space for justices and adequate space for the Court to sit. We anticipate the relocation to take place, most likely, by the end of February, providing a solution to some of the constraints we have faced in terms of facilities.

Since you became Deputy Chief

Justice, what has changed at the Court of Appeal?

Since assuming the role of Deputy Chief Justice, the nature and duties of the Court have remained unchanged. However, there has been collaborative effort with the Justices and support staff—with a common goal, purpose, and objective of improving the Court's performance. This collective effort has resulted in positive improvements in the Court's overall performance.

As mentioned earlier, we haven't successfully decreased the overall workload backlog at the Court. However, our efforts have been concentrated on specific case categories, yielding significant impact. For instance, we used to have election petitions pending at this Court till the term of Parliament ends. We have managed to handle and conclude all election petition appeals. Following by-elections that resulted from cases where the Court mandated a rehearing, additional petitions were filed in the High Court. We successfully completed the hearings for those two cases last month. So, at least that is an area where working as a team has delivered results.

I think it would be the first time that this Court has concluded all election petitions in the subsistence of the Parliament in which those petitions arose. We

prioritised handling election petition matters because the law obliges us to. And this is a big achievement, in my view.

The Constitution also obliges us to give priority to Constitutional matters. In this regard, we have heard and concluded Constitutional matters as a matter of priority, reducing pending Constitutional petitions at the Court. If we did not have [COVID-19 interruptions], our plan was to have no pending Constitutional matters as backlog, by now.

But, as it stands now, we hope that in the current year if we handle two or three Constitutional Petition sessions as planned, we may have no backlog. If that is not achieved this year, due to unforeseen reasons, certainly next year, we must.

We have also increased the number of criminal sessions, handled at the headquarters and upcountry. Criminal appeals happen in many cases when the appellants are serving sentence, and it is important that the appeals are handled quickly and disposed of so that appellants know their fate in respect of the sentences they are serving.

When we handle these sessions, especially upcountry, it makes sense to people that the Court has come to handle their cases at the original stations where



the trials were handled. We hope this will be further reinforced by actually having branches upcountry.

In respect of criminal appeals, we have also had a focus on appeals arising from the Anti-Corruption Court, which was created specifically to give priority to criminal trials involving corruption cases. That priority in our view, should also be reflected at the Court of Appeal, so that these cases are disposed of quickly.

Transparency and efficiency are essential in the Judiciary. What measures are in place to promote this at the Court of Appeal?

We have Court of Appeal stakeholders’ meetings, such as the quarterly Court Users Committee Meeting at which the court users share their views on how they are being served. We take their views seriously and try to address them. We have a system of people raising issues in respect of their cases by writing to the Registrar. We also have an administrator of this court who attends to any issues in terms of administration of the court.

We have weekly meetings as Justices where we discuss any issues that arise. We have support staff meetings that are chaired by the Administrator and Registrar of the Court. So, any issues that arise have been addressed by these administrative arrangements in place.

How improved access to justice, particularly for individuals or groups who may face barriers in navigating the legal system?

The Court handles appeals. If someone has any problems in the court process, the law provides avenue for appeals. If it’s a criminal matter, civil matter they appeal to this court. The best we can do is the expeditious handling and disposal of the appeals. We do not have original trials in criminal and civil matters. We

only have original jurisdiction in respect of Constitutional matters where people who have any problems may petition the Constitutional Court.

What technological innovations has the Court of Appeal embraced to improve case management?

We are implementing the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS). We are one of the courts that were identified to pilot ECCMIS. I think, in this area, we are doing well. Our Judges and staff were all trained. We learnt a lot from the “COVID period” and started having our Justices’ meetings on Zoom. This improved on the time we use for our meetings, which we had from 10 o’clock, sometimes they would go on up to 1:00 o’clock. These days, we have our meetings for an hour or less. However, we mix these zoom meetings with physical ones which has greatly helped us.

We also conduct appeals online for prisoners that may be in distant prisons. [This] reduces the expense incurred in transporting prisoners to court, and also reduces the time spent on the

trials. We have handled cases upcountry sessions and given judgments online. So, technology has helped this court greatly.

What measures are in place to monitor the performance of Judges and other personnel involved in the judicial process?

During the weekly meetings for Justices, where we share the workload and make an annual work plan. For instance, for 2024, we have an annual work plan that has been agreed upon. Each of us agrees on implementation. What is each Judge going to do? When do you take leave? Which sessions to handle? All that is agreed upon during the meetings.

Each head of panel is responsible for monitoring performance of the panel and to report to the weekly meetings. This has been effective in monitoring the performance of each Judge and each panel. So we monitor each other. And everybody knows what each of us is doing and what remains to be done. We agree on the improvements that every individual has to make.

What is your vision for the Court of Appeal?

My vision for the Court of Appeal is tied to the vision of the whole Judiciary to render Justice for All. That is, the transformation agenda of the Judiciary to serve the population of Uganda and offer justice to all. We look forward to increasing the number of the Judges to 35 as well as have branches upcountry. We have started to implement Alternative Dispute Resolution. We now have Appellate Mediation in place and last year, we handled more than 30 mediations, which is equal to a full session of the Court. We are now working on the rules for Mediation and shall continue to promote it. ■

“
My vision for the Court of Appeal is tied to the vision of the whole Judiciary to render Justice for All. That is, the transformation agenda of the Judiciary to serve the population of Uganda and offer justice to all. We look forward to increasing the number of the Judges to 35 as well as have branches upcountry.”



Court of Appeal holds 11 Criminal Appeals sessions to fight case backlog

By Rose Ampurira

With an aim to fight case backlog and take services closer to the people of Uganda, the Court of Appeal has been conducting Criminal Appeals sessions in different parts of the country.

According to the Court of Appeal's Annual Performance Report for the year 2023, the court held a total of 11 criminal sessions. Three (3) of these were internal Criminal sessions held in Kampala while eight (8) were external sessions held in Gulu, Fort Portal, Masaka, Jinja, Mbale, Mbarara, Arua and Kabale.

Deputy Chief Justice, Richard Buteera, with Justices Geoffery Kiryabwire, Fredrick Egonda-Ntende, Cheborion Barishaki, Catherine Bamugemereire, Muzamiru Kibeedi, Irene Mulyagonja, Monica Mugenyi, Christopher Gashirabake, Eva Luswata, and John Oscar Kihika, handled the sessions.

Promoting equitable access to justice services

Flagging off one of the Criminal Appeals sessions at Kabale High Court in November of last year, during a stakeholders meeting, Deputy Chief Justice Richard Buteera highlighted that traditionally, the Court of Appeal/Constitutional Court holds its sessions in Kampala. However, recognising the importance of improving access to justice for the people of Uganda, the Court made a strategic decision to hold Regional Court of Appeal Sessions.

He noted that this initiative, not only reduces the burden on litigants to travel to Kampala but also minimises the associated costs.

Justice Buteera underscored that

beyond the logistical considerations, the Sessions also aimed to promote equitable access to Judiciary services, with a specific focus on addressing the prevalent case backlog.

Highlighting the commitment to timely delivery of justice, the Deputy Chief Justice emphasised that the court would ensure swift delivery of decisions once the hearings are concluded, striving to meet the ends of justice within reasonable time-frames.

The Deputy Chief Justice also called for the expeditious disposal of cases, emphasising the importance of speedy trials and strict adherence to the law. He further encouraged advocates to participate in the scheduled meetings with presiding Justices at the conclusion of the session, fostering constructive dialogue for ongoing improvements.

429 cases handled

According to Deputy Registrar in charge of the Criminal Registry at Court of Appeal, HW Lillian Bucyana, the selection of cases for cause listing for these Criminal sessions depend on the high court circuit that the Justices are scheduled to sit. This is in accordance with the Court of Appeal Rules, particularly Rule 7(3) & (4).

She noted that the general policy for cause listing follows a "First in, First out" criteria. However, there are some exceptions. Notably, the Court of Appeal prioritises appeals from the Anti-



Corruption Division of the High Court, irrespective of the appeal's age, as long as the lower court record is made available.

HW Bucyana further highlighted that the increase in external sessions leads to a notable increase in the number of cases disposed of. She noted that the Court, through these sessions, was able to resolve 249 cases in 2022, and that by the end of December 2023, this number doubled to 429 disposals.

The Court of Appeal's decision to hold criminal sessions in different High Courts across Uganda signifies a commitment to justice that is accessible, responsive, and inclusive. ■



The Chief Justice hands over the seal of Court to Kitgum Resident Judge Phillip Mwaka at the formal launch of the Court.

Principal Judge’s memorable quotes at launches of nine new High Court Circuits

In the last two years, the Principal Judge, Dr Flavian Zeija has operationalized and launched nine new High Court Circuits. Following the enhancement of the Judiciary budget and the appointment of more Judges, the Principal Judge operationalized six High Court Circuits. The delay in the operationalization of these High Court Circuits was attributed to logistical and manpower issues.

After the operationalization of the six new Courts, the Hon. the Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny – Dollo, in exercise of his powers under Section 19(2) of the Judicature Act, and in consultation with the Principal Judge issued Statutory Instrument No.94 of 2023 creating New High Courts Circuits and re-organizing those that have been in existence.

The new Instrument created 38 High Court Circuits and consequently revoked Judicature (Designation of High Court Circuits) Instrument, 2016, No. 55 of 2016 that had created 20 Circuits. While flagging off the new Courts, the Principal Judge had this to say.

Hoima High Court Circuit – November 1, 2022

“My vision for the High Court and

subordinate courts thereto in particular and for the Judiciary in general, is to be the best in Africa and even beyond. And with your support, this we can achieve. To ensure that this vision is realized, I give my commitment to put in place measures that enable courts to deliver justice in a fair, timely and impartial manner.”

Luwero High Court Circuit – November 2, 2022

Operationalization of this circuit will shorten the long distance that the people of Luwero, Nakasongola and Nakaseke have been travelling in order to be able to access services of the High Court at the various High Court Divisions in Kampala. The new High Court Circuit will also significantly reduce costs that the people of these districts have incurred over the years in travelling to

Kampala to be able to access the High Court.

Iganga High Court Circuit – February 13, 2023

“Over the years, there has been persistent public outcry about the High Court being far away from our people in many parts of the country. Our people in many parts of the country are still travelling for long distances to be able to access services of the High Court. Thus, as the head of the High Court, I’m very committed to take the High Court nearer to the people. The launch of Iganga High Court Circuit today is a testimony of this commitment. The judiciary wants to make it very convenient for our people to access judicial services at all levels of the hierarchy of Courts.”



The Principal Judge handing over a court register to Justice David Batema, the Resident Judge of Iganga High Court Circuit.



The launch of Rukungiri High Court. Left is the Principal Judge. Right is the Rukungiri Resident Judge.

Rukungiri High Court Circuit - February 6, 2023

“The idea of bringing justice closer to the people has for many years been one of the key priorities in the Judiciary’s transformation Agenda. As a result, Rukungiri High Court was among the six High Court Circuits that were operationalized effective September 18, 2022 with the deployment of a Resident Judge, the Hon. Justice Tom Chemutai.

Rukungiri High court circuit covers Rukungiri and Kanungu districts. This means that our people in these two districts will no longer have to stroll for long distances to access the High Court at Kabale. All ongoing case files arising from Rukungiri and Kanungu districts and previously filed at Kabale High Court Circuit have already been transferred from Kabale High Court Circuit to this circuit.”

Tororo High Court Circuit – February 21, 2023

The Judiciary has come up with strategies and mechanisms to ensure that you- the people, from who we deliver judicial power, easily access justice; some of these mechanism are;

1. Increasing the number of Courts in order to make Courts closer to the people. As Judiciary top administration, we are very committed to take judicial services nearer to the people. The launch of this Circuit today is a testimony of our commitment. Plans are underway to decentralize the Court of Appeal away from Kampala. More High Court Circuits will be operationalized as well as more magisterial areas. The Judiciary wants to make it very convenient for our people to easily access justice at all levels of the hierarchy of Courts.
2. Increasing the number of the Judicial officers. More judicial officers and courts help in reducing the workload per judicial officer or court, which consequently leads to reduced case backlog.
3. We have also put in place policies intended to ensure that our people are served effectively and diligently. These include;
 - Certainty of hearing dates. Our Judicial Officers should ensure that the trial or hearing takes place on the date it is listed to kick off.
 - Excellent customer care practices. Court staff are required to be courteous, respectful, fair and prompt in executing their duties.
 - Zero tolerance to corruption. This goes to the court staff and the public alike. Justice is not for sale and the court staff should not demand for money from the public in exchange for services. Likewise, the public



The Principal Judge handing over the court seal to Lady Justice Mary Ikit at the launch of Moroto High Court Circuit

should desist from tempting the court staff with bribes.

- Delivery of judgements within 60 days after hearing. This will enable us avoid backlog judgements and rulings.
- Establishment of the Inspectorate of Courts to receive and manage complainants from Court users and the general public. Currently the Inspectorate of Courts is centrally located in Kampala. However, plans are underway to decentralize it at regional levels in order to shorten the distance travelled by court users to lodge complaints.
- Innovations such as small claims procedure, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Plea Bargaining and Electronic Court Case Management Information System intended to quicken disposal of cases and making courts more accessible.

Bushenyi High Court Circuit – March 19, 2024

As Judiciary, we have over time heard your cries in the quest for justice. I'm glad to inform you that we embarked on putting in place strategies to address challenges that affect the public in the search for justice. We therefore, embarked on a "Transformation Agenda" anchored on our vision of "Justice for All"

Our transformation agenda, is buttressed in the Judiciary's Strategic Plan V 2020-2025, whose main objectives are:

1. To enhance equitable access to Judiciary Services;
2. To improve Court processes and case management;
3. To strengthen the use of ICT in the administration of justice;
4. To develop and support the Judiciary workforce and institutional capacity;
5. To improve coordination, partnerships and accountability;
6. To improve public awareness and the image of the Judiciary; and
7. To enhance resource mobilization and management.

Kiboga High Court Circuit – February 19, 2024

We shall operationalize more High Court Circuits and more Magisterial areas. In the near future, we should be able to at least have a Magistrate Grade One in every constituency, and a Chief Magistrate in every district, depending on the resource envelope. In this regard, we have already completed studies to re-gazette the existing magisterial areas with a view of creating a Chief Magistrate's Court at every district and a Magistrate Grade One Court in every Constituency.

Moroto High Court Circuit – May 8, 2023

The Judiciary launched a High Court Circuit in Moroto District with the aim of reducing case backlog and cut transport costs to Soroti High Court. The Moroto High Court Circuit will now serve the nine Districts that make up Karamoja sub-region.

The court will provide easier access to justice for the local communities. The Court was launched by the Principal Judge, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, who said daily hearings of cases will be conducted to reduce the backlog and ensure timely justice. Adding that the launch was a fulfilment of the pledge by the Judiciary to ensure that justice is accessible to all.

Kitgum High Court Circuit – March 11, 2024

Let us kick- start serious work in this new Circuit with the resources already available as we look for more resources to fill the gaps. I would like to recommend the following good practices from the start.

1. Zero tolerance to corruption.
2. Starting Court on time and efficient use of judiciary time and resources.
3. Serving court users courteously and respectfully.
4. Maintaining organized archives so that file retrieval is easy.
5. Conducting weeding out exercises regularly to avoid clogging the system.
6. Encouraging use of Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms like plea bargaining, mediation among others
7. Delivery of judgements within 60 days after completion of hearing.
8. Regular meetings with stakeholders to enable coordination and collaboration in execution of court duties. ■



Progress on the daily hearings at the Criminal Division

A year after roll-out of a pilot programme of hearing criminal cases on a day-to-day basis, the Criminal Division of the High Court has consistently met set targets. These were set at a minimum of 100 cases completed per month.

By Rose Namanya

In 20 months of implementation, a total of 2,242 cases were complete; a monthly average of 111 cases. Further, the backlog was significantly reduced, by 9.32%.

Scope

This Strategy, according to Justice Michael Elubu, the head of the Criminal Division, is aligned with the Constitutional prerogative in Article 28 (1) that provides for the right to a speedy and fair trial. He said that the overarching objective of the pilot project was to fulfil the Judiciary's mission "To efficiently and effectively administer justice."

The Criminal Division, with six Judges and two registrars, handles all criminal cases that originate from the Magisterial Areas of Buganda Road, the Standards and Utilities' Court, Nakawa, Makindye, Kiira, Kasangati, Nabweru, Wakiso, Entebbe and Kajjansi.

This means that all session cases as well as appeals, revisions, and applications from these areas are handled. "It would also follow that the supervision of the criminal jurisdiction of these courts falls under the Criminal Division," Justice Elubu said.

In preparation for the launch of the pilot phase, Justice Elubu said the Division re-organised its file allocation system. Under the Criminal Session system, files



The Principal Judge, Dr. Flavian Zeija, recently chaired a review meeting for daily hearing to assess its impact.

were kept in a pool pending allocation after cause listing. "In a departure from that procedure, the Criminal Division allocated all the pending files equally to each of the then five Division Judges. The allocation was then followed by a weed-out exercise that eliminated dead records," he added.

The testing of the Daily Hearings Project began in January 2022 but the project is set to run till January 2024, when daily hearing of criminal cases at the High Court level is expected to be formalised and rolled out across the country. Statistics show that before the pilot programme, as at 31 December 2021, the Criminal Division had a total caseload of 1,790 cases.

Also, though the backlog stood at 441 cases on 31 December 2021, by 31 October 2023, the case backlog was 472. "Suffice to note here that the numerical increment of both the caseload and backlog during the pilot period was due to increased filing in the same period," Justice Elubu explained.

It is expected that by the time the project is concluded. There will be an increase in the rate of disposal of criminal cases, and a reduction in the length of the pre-trial period. This will increase productivity within the Criminal Division; reduce the rate at which bail applications are made, increase the convict-to-remand ratio within the prison population and will contribute to achieving elimination of the case backlog at the Criminal Division. ■



What others say about the daily hearings...

"I am glad to be part of this wonderful and noble project. Having served as a court assessor before several Judges, this is a step in the right direction for the Judiciary. There is no doubt that this improves access to justice and also reduce case backlog," - Lubaga Robert Sseguya, Court Assessor.



"The Daily hearings at the High Court Criminal Division have significantly fortified the Constitutional edict of ensuring fair, expeditious, and public adjudication of criminal cases. This commendable initiative has also ameliorated the burgeoning caseload, thus, averting the prolonged incarceration of numerous suspects and affording respite to several victims of crime who would otherwise have languished in anticipation of the elusive moment when their matters would be judiciously addressed,"-Timothy Amerit, Senior State Attorney, ODPP.

"Daily hearings at the High Court have helped in decongesting the prisons. It has also seen many prisoners released while others have been convicted and are now serving their sentences. This is much better than the session-based hearings," - Bongomin Morris, Prisons Liaison officer, Criminal Division, High Court Kampala.



"Daily hearing of cases is good in reducing backlog and since its commencement, many cases have been completed. As a process server, it is hectic tracing witnesses on a daily basis, since some of the witnesses have relocated to unknown places and to villages, while the given phone contacts may be unavailable. It is rare to get all witnesses of a particular case in one day. We also get complaints from witnesses of short notices and they decline to attend court on a given date, while witnesses from upcountry always complain of lack of transport given the short time. Processing for funds to participate in these daily hearings from CID Headquarters is sometimes hard," - Mbiro Dinani, Police Process Server.

"The daily hearings have gone a long way to offer speedy trial and also reduce case backlog. This system also makes the work of a clerk easy while cause listing since it bases on first come-first serve," - Emmanuel Akatwijuka, Court Clerk, Criminal Division.



"Before the introduction of this programme, hearing of criminal cases was in session form where a Judge would be allocated 40 cases to handle within one month. This, however, was not consistent since it was dependent on availability of funds. Therefore, the daily hearings are a cure to delays and reduce the abuse of fundamental human rights of accused persons in criminal justice system. Daily hearings have prevented the accused from being on long remand periods, and it also gives an opportunity to the accused person to be heard immediately after committal. We have also seen it reduce the cost of interim remedies such as bail applications. Judges have adopted a policy of cause listing some bail applicants for trial, which has boosted public confidence in the justice system. My prayer is that the daily hearings continue such that we reach a level of hearing cases that are committed in the same year," - Bak Richard Kumbuga, State Brief Counsel.



Chief Justice establishes new Judiciary Committees for effective administration of justice

The Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny – Dollo, has in exercise of his powers under Article 133 (1) of the Constitution; Sections 6 and 7 of the Administration of the Judiciary Act, 2020 and The Administration of the Judiciary (Establishment of Committees) Regulations 2023; The Administration of the Judiciary (Inspectorate of Courts) Regulations, 2023; established 10 Committees of the Judiciary necessary for the effective administration of justice.

The committees established cut across the different strata of the Judiciary Administrative Structure and their tenure, composition, procedure, and functions are contained in the Committee Regulations.

For purposes of effective management and to ensure that the committees achieve their intended objectives, each Committee is headed by a senior Judicial Officer who include the Deputy Chief Justice, the Principal Judge, a Justice of the Supreme Court or Judge of the High Court.

Below are the established committees and their respective Chairpersons;



Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo.

SN	COMMITTEE	CHAIRPERSON
1.	The Planning, Development and Finance Committee	Hon. Justice Richard Buteera (Deputy Chief Justice)
2.	The Case Management Committee	Hon. Justice Richard Buteera (Deputy Chief Justice)
3.	The Law Reform Committee	Hon. Justice Dr Flavian Zeija (Principal Judge)
4.	The Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee	Hon. Lady Justice Prof. Lillian Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza (Justice of the Supreme Court)
5.	The Performance Management and Awards Committee	Hon. Justice Mike Chibita (Justice of the Supreme Court)
6.	The Disciplinary Committee	Hon. Lady Justice Percy Night Tuhaise (Justice of the Supreme Court)
7.	The Information Communications Technology and Documentation Committee	Hon. Justice Christopher Izama Madrama (Justice of the Supreme Court)
8.	Integrity Committee	Hon. Lady Justice Monica Kalyegira Mugenyi (Justice of the Supreme Court)
9.	Human Capital Development, Gender and Equity Mainstreaming Committee	Hon. Lady Justice Dr Catherine K. Bamugemereire (Justice of the Supreme Court)
10.	Audit Committee	Hon. Justice David K. Wangutusi (Retired)



Chief Justice issues new Inspectorate of Courts Regulations

The Chief Justice, Alfonso Chigamoy Owiny – Dollo on November 24, 2023 issued The Administration of the Judiciary (Inspectorate of Courts) Regulations, 2023.

The purpose of these Regulations is to operationalise Part III of the Administration of the Judiciary Act, 2020 for effective operation of the Inspectorate.

The new Regulations empower the Inspectorate to i) access to all court records and official records kept by a judicial officer; ii) require any person to supply any information or answer any question relating to the conduct of a case or trial; iii) require a person to produce any document necessary for the discharge of the functions of the Inspectorate; and (iv) compel the attendance of any person before the Inspectorate.

Objectives

The objectives of the Inspectorate are to: i) promote good governance in the Judiciary Service; ii) promote integrity among the staff of the Judiciary; iii) ensure compliance with constitutional and statutory requirements in the administration of justice iv) to promote compliance with the Uganda Judicial Code of Conduct, the Judiciary Service Code of Conduct, and the Public Service Code of Conduct; v) ensure compliance with the service delivery standards of the Judiciary and the Judiciary Client Charter; vi) promote quality assurance in the administration of justice; vii) cooperate and coordinate with the Judicial Service Commission in handling disciplinary matters against members of staff of the Judiciary; and viii) coordinate with other justice, law and order institutions in strengthening the



Justice Stephen Musota is the current Chief Inspector of Courts

integrity of the staff of the Judiciary in the administration of justice.

The Regulations also instituted an Inspectorate of Courts which consists of the Chief Inspector of Courts – a Justice of the Supreme Court, a Registrar and such number of Deputy Registrars, Assistant Registrars, Magistrates and administrative and other staff of the Judiciary designated by the Chief Justice in accordance with Section 8 of the Act.

The Chief Inspector of Courts is Hon. Justice Stephen Musota, Justice of the Supreme Court.

Functions of Inspectorate

The functions of the Inspectorate include i) inspecting courts and investigation of complaints made against the staff of the Judiciary; ii) receiving and processing

internal and external complaints against any staff of the Judiciary; iii) investigating cases of maladministration of justice or any matter within its mandate under the Act; iv) examining and taking custody of any judicial and administration records necessary for its investigations; v) recommending remedial actions as appropriate, during inspection, to correct cases of maladministration in the Judiciary; vi) interfacing with and sensitise stakeholders and the general public on the administration of justice; and vii) enforcing the Uganda Code of Judicial Conduct, the Judiciary Service Code of Conduct and the Public Service code of conduct in the Judiciary.

The Regulations also establish the Judiciary Integrity Committee. The Integrity Committee is chaired by Hon. Lady Justice Monica Kalyegira Mugenyi, Justice of the Supreme Court. The key mandate of the Integrity Committee is to popularise the Judicial Code of Conduct and the Judiciary Service Code of Conduct to staff of the Judiciary; undertake periodic nationwide visits to courts to monitor compliance with the Code of Conduct; and coordinate the activities of peer committees.

Peer Committees are also provided for in the Regulations as a soft tool to promote integrity and encourage adherence to the Code of Conduct among members of the peer committee.

The Regulations also provide a simplified complaints form used to register complaints. ■



The year in review in the Judiciary

JANUARY

When LexisNexis Vice President paid a courtesy call on Chief Justice

The Vice President and Treasurer of LexisNexis Rule of Law Foundation, Ms Teresa Jennings, paid a courtesy call on the Chief Justice, Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny-Dollo at the Judiciary headquarters. The Chief Justice expressed interest in a tool that will enable Judges to research and write Judgements using a software which can be used offline. This, he said, would allow expedite case decisions and help them manage and resolve pending caseload. Ms Jennings thanked the Chief Justice for his hospitality and insight saying, she looked forward to a great partnership. The meeting was attended by Court of Appeal Justice, Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire.



Court of Appeal bids farewell to long-serving librarian

The Court of Appeal formally bid farewell to its long-serving librarian, Mr Joseph Arube, after he clocked the mandatory retirement age, in a ceremony presided over by Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Richard Buteera. He had served for more than 30 years in the Judiciary at the time of his

retirement. The Deputy Chief Justice commended the Court of Appeal family for organising the event and seeing him off in an honourable manner. He said it was an opportunity to say thank you for his years of service.

Justice Buteera said he met Mr Arube

many years ago when he was Inspector of Courts as the Supreme Court library was being set up. Different speakers went on to commend Mr Arube for his diligent service over the years. Deputy Registrar, HW Lillian Bucyana, noted that he was the Court's longest serving staff member.

FEBRUARY

Barefoot Law Team Visits Kole Court

A four-member team from Barefoot Law visited Kole Magistrate's Court to discuss how to enhance access justice in Kole. The Barefoot Law team were led by Mr

Isaac Jonathan Otim the General counsel and director legal.

During the interaction with the resident

Magistrate Grade I, HW Nyakairu Edger, it was agreed that Barefoot Law supports legal empowerment of the communities within the Court's jurisdiction.



ACD Engages Court Users

Anti-Corruption Division (ACD) of the High Court held a Court Users Committee meeting where all the Judges participated.

Head of the Court, Justice Lawrence Gidudu, commended the efforts of Judicial Officers that saw the Court recognised for its good performance at the 27th JLOS Annual Review and at the 24th Annual Judges Conference. In addition, he commended the prosecutors, and defence counsel for the work well done.



Justice Gidudu noted that due to scarcity of funds, the Court was unable to accomplish some activities such as

training on Plea Bargaining Rules and the Case Management Rules.

He thanked USAID for donating a Heavy Duty Copier/Printer, one 70-Inch TV Set, a 3KVA power stabiliser and nine Conference chairs. That these items are critical to the operations of the Court.

The Judge reiterated his commitment and that of the Court to administer justice without ill will or favour.

ECCMIS Sensitization Goes to Naalya, Kira Areas

As part of public awareness and sensitisation campaigns about the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS), teams from Judiciary camped in markets and trading centres under Wakiso District to sensitise different communities on the new e-system.

The Public Relations and Communications Registry together with Information Communications Technology (ICT) department set up a tent at Kira Chief Magistrates Court, sensitised communities in Kira Town, Kyaliwajala and crowned the day at Naalya Market.

The teams supported with an outside broadcasting van and skaters, distributed IEC materials and sensitised different



groups about the new e-court system. This culminated in a quiz where participants were rewarded with ECCMIS branded t-shirts, water bottles, keyholders, wristbands, among other items.

New premises for Kira Court

Principal Judge, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, presided over the official opening ceremony of the new Kira Chief Magistrates Court premises in Kira Municipality, Wakiso District. He thanked Buganda Land Board for the conducive environment offered while the court was still housed at their premises. The Mayor, Kira Municipality, for the 'promised land' to construct a permanent home for the Court. Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu, laid emphasis on the need for staff to attend to court users with courtesy. "Since the public is longing for better court services, there is need to improve on how we handle our clients." On his part, the Mayor, Mr Julius Mutebi Nsubuga, promised to fast track the finalisation of securing land for the Judiciary to construct court premises.

MARCH

Iganga High Court's first Bar-Bench Meeting

The meeting that was chaired by the Resident Judge, Justice David Batema, drew participants from the eight Districts under the Circuit; Mayuge, Luuka,

Kaliro, Bugweri, Namutumba, Bugiri and Namayingo. It drew participation from Judicial Officers under the Circuit as well as advocates in private practice and

State Attorneys. The meeting resolved to ensure that the new Circuit lives to its mandate to deliver justice for all through cooperation with all justice actors.



Mbale High Court Childcare Centre Launched

On March 20, 2023, different stakeholders gathered at Mbale High Court Circuit to witness the launch of the child care centre at the Court. The Centre was formally launched by the Head of Circuit, Justice Godfrey Namundi who applauded the Judiciary administration for the innovation of setting up child-friendly facilities at courts.

He said such facilities provide safe spaces where children can fully participate and be heard during court hearings. He added that the spaces offer an opportunity to court staff to nurse their children when they are at Court.

The Judiciary Under Secretary, Ms. Maureen Kasande, said setting up child care centres is part of the Judiciary Strategic Plan. “The plan is to set up 67 child care centers at the different courts by 2025. I am very glad that we are looking at the first steps being taken and with time, more shall follow,” she noted.

The Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu, noted that having child care centres at a place of work lowers rates of absenteeism of nursing mothers, increases morale and activity and provides a return on investment.



600 cases handled in Hoima, Masindi prison camps

More than 600 cases were handled during prison camps held at both Hoima and Masindi prisons. The cases handled included capital, petty and juvenile offences.

The Principal Judge, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, formally launched the Camp at Masindi Main Prison where he addressed Justice Actors, accused persons, students from Pepperdine University and Uganda Christian University.

The Principal Judge described Plea Bargaining as “a case backlog reduction intervention and strategy that the Judiciary developed and has been implementing since the year 2014.”

On her part, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo emphasized the need for fairness by all justice actors including Judicial Officers as well as accused persons taking into account the interests of the victim.

Prof Danny DeWalt, the Vice President Pepperdine University commended the Principal Judge for his able leadership and vision to improve the plea bargaining programme in Ugandan courts.

Mukono High Court Holds First Bar-Bench Meeting

The meeting was chaired by the Head of Circuit, Justice David Matovu with Lady Justices Florence Nakachwa and Christine Kaahwa in attendance. The Deputy Registrar, HW Elizabeth Akullo, Research Magistrates and more than 30 Advocates practicing within the Circuit participated.

The meeting agreed to convene bi-annually and have other stakeholder meetings.

The three Cs of cooperation, communication and coordination were emphasized. Critical issues of concern to the Bar and Bench in the administration

of justice were discussed, namely; case backlog in land claims and criminal cases, professional conduct, registry gaps like missing files, delays in transmission of files and pleadings for action; delays in handling of bail applications, conmen and fraud in obtaining Letters of Administration, forgeries of orders of court, etc.



DCJ Presides Over First Kumi CM Court Open Day

On March 24, 2023, the Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Richard Buteera, presided over the first Court Open Day at Kumi Chief Magistrate’s Court. The Open Day was described by many as historic for not only the Court but all justice institutions.

The Deputy Chief Justice reassured them that the open day was “a day that Judicial Officers, State Attorneys, Members of the Bar, Police, other Justice Actors plus Court Staff come together to interact with the people we serve.”

He added that taking services closer



to the people is part of Judiciary’s transformational agenda. holding Court Open Days is among the key strategies for achieving this agenda.

APRIL

Special SGBV Court Session Conviction Rate Increases to 70%

Recent statistics indicate that the conviction rate of sexual and gender based violence cases has increased from less than 20 per cent to more than 70 percent.

These findings were revealed by Dr. Mary Otieno, UNFPA Representative to Uganda in her speech which was delivered by Ms Rachel Ogolla during a High Level Breakfast Meeting on the upcoming Phase Six special court

sessions on SGBV cases.

“Since the inception of the special sessions in 2018, over 2000 SGBV Cases have been handled,” the speech read in part.

She encouraged the Judiciary and the Governance Security Programme actors to mainstream best practices noted from the previous sessions held into their routine work, in order to sustain the

tremendous progress in administering justice of these cases through special sessions.

The Acting Principal Judge, Hon. Justice Musa Ssekaana, who chaired the high level meeting at Sheraton Kampala Hotel, noted that the sessions were undertaken “as part of fulfilment of Uganda’s obligations at international and regional level aimed at addressing the broader goals under gender and access to justice in SDG5 and 16. The ultimate goal of the special sessions is to facilitate the disposal of SGBV cases through the justice system in adherence to set standards and norms.”

He noted that there was urgent need to identify the other cases that fall under this category, apart from defilement, murder, rape, trafficking in persons, domestic violence and assault.





DCJ officiates at Kiruhura Open Day

On Friday, April 28, 2023 court users thronged Kiruhura Chief Magistrate's Court to interface with different court officials on different aspects in the administration of justice during the Court's Open Day.

The Day was presided over by the Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Richard Buteera, noted that the Judiciary had embarked on a transformational agenda to enhance access to justice for all by improving physical access to courts.

Judiciary's Transformational Agenda is to Improve Service Delivery – Deputy Chief Justice

The Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Richard Buteera, has said the Judiciary's transformational agenda is to take justice services closer to the people by constructing and operationalizing more courts to reduce on the distance people travel to access courts.

This, he said, while officiating over the Kiboga Court Open Day on April 5, 2023 where he noted that Open Days were part and parcel of the Judiciary transformation agenda to give a platform to the public to give feedback to the courts about its services.



MAY

PS/SJ, CR Inspect Katakwi, Soroti courts' building sites

The Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana and the Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu carried out inspections in Soroti and Katakwi. They were accompanied by Eng. Dr. Christopher Ebal, the Commissioner Engineering and Estates, who led them through the construction sites of Soroti High Court and Katakwi Chief Magistrates Court. The inspection at the construction site of Soroti High Court followed a recommendation of a meeting where it was agreed that the court hall for the new High Court premises to be expanded. During that meeting, the Resident Judge Justice Dr. Henry Peter Adonyo proposed some significant changes to address the limited space that necessitated approval by management. It is against this background that the Permanent Secretary and the Chief Registrar visited the site to appreciate the prevailing circumstances in order to make a final decision regarding the proposals.

Pepperdine University students pay courtesy call on Deputy Chief Justice

The Deputy Chief Justice hosted 12 Pepperdine University students who were interning at the different courts. The students were led by the Pepperdine University Director of East

Africa Programmes, Mr Scott Leist. The purpose of their visit was to understand how Courts in Uganda operate and the application of Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms.

Family Division Staff Commit to Improved Service Delivery

Members of Staff at the Family Division pledged to work at improving customer service at the Division. The commitment was made during a meeting chaired by the Head of the Division, Justice John Eudes Keitirima.

The meeting follows feedback from the Bar-Bench forum held on Thursday May 10, 2023, where the staff were faulted of having poor customer care coupled with a disorganized archive. To counter these allegations, the Judge announced

feedback mechanisms that the Court is putting in place. These include a records book where compliments and complaints will be recorded for review by the Court's leadership. The other being an internal client charter outlining what the public should expect at the Division. This will be followed by a customer care training.

Justice Keitirima implored the staff to change their attitude towards work in order to make an impact.



JUNE

Chief Registrar’s Impromptu Visit at Entebbe CM Court



The Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu, conducted an impromptu inspection of Entebbe Chief Magistrates Court. The Chief Magistrate of the Court, HW Stella Maris Amabilis gave the Chief Registrar a tour of the Court. Even amidst space constraints and an obvious need for renovation of the Court house, it’s archives were found in

meticulous order and all exhibits in stores well labeled by case number and parties. The Chief Registrar also perused the attendance register and case registers. All staff were found at the station and were commended for exhibiting great teamwork and exemplary attention to detail in their respective dockets.

Judgement Writing Tool

Court of Appeal’s Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, and Chairperson of the Judiciary ICT Committee chaired a meeting to discuss and approve the Judgement Writing Tool inception report. The report was presented by Mr. Kikabi David Sunday, the head of the Judiciary ICT Department. In attendance,

HW Juliet Hatanga, HW Bucyana Lillian, a team from the Judiciary ICT led by Mr. Kikabi and a team from Lexis Nexis, led by the Vice President and Treasurer of LexisNexis Rule of Law Foundation, Ms Teresa Jennings.

Justice Kiryabwire noted the need to

customize the tool to ensure that it is fully utilized. Once the Judgement Writing Tool is developed, it will be linked to the Electronic Court Case Management Information System and the Uganda Legal Information Institute.

UJOA holds 2023 Annual General Meeting

Uganda Judicial Officers’ Association (UJOA) on June 2, 2023 held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Judiciary Headquarters, Kampala. The UJOA Annual General Meeting is held every year to account to the Association Members, the achievements and challenges encountered during the year.

The hybrid meeting which enlisted both physical and virtual participation was chaired by Justice Tadeo Asiimwe, the President of the Association.

During the presentation of the annual report, the President urged members to keep UJOA ideals alive. and to equally adhere to the Judicial Code of Conduct.

The UJOA Executive pledged to more engagement of its members and stakeholders for better welfare, promotion of different sports activities, purchase of UJOA van. They also committed to fast track the Association’s Constitution amendment, sensitization and training through webinars and dialogue series as well as reviewing and drawing of the Strategic Plan 2023/26.

JULY

Justice Mutonyi enlightens pupils on the role of the Judiciary

On Friday July 28, 2023, Lady Justice Margaret Mutonyi of the High Court took time off her busy schedule to interact with more than 80 pupils of Alpha and Omega Nursery and Primary School, Wakiso. The pupils were visiting the Judiciary Headquarters to learn how the arm of

Government works. During their tour, the children who showed a great interest in studying law, attended a live court session presided over by Lady Justice Mutonyi.

After the session, HW Festo Nsenga, the Deputy Registrar Criminal Division,

demonstrated to the pupils what happens in a courtroom setting. Here, some pupils were able to role-play as Judges, clerks, advocates and witnesses. The children were later taken through the functions of the Judiciary, its mandate and hierarchy.



AUGUST

Chief Justice constitutes committee to spearhead ADR Programme

The Chief Justice constituted a Committee comprised of retired Justices, Judges, and senior advocates to re-engineer Alternative Dispute Resolution pilot program in all the courts of record for two years.

This is a strategic intervention to free up resources locked up in the courts and give momentum to ongoing initiatives to modernize and re-energize the wheels of justice, required of a responsive and people-centred Judiciary.



Chief Justice Assigns HW Ereemye Judiciary PRO Role

The Chief Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo, by letter dated 28th August 2023, assigned Ag. Registrar Magistrates Affairs & Data Management, His Worship Ereemye Jumire James Mawanda as the new Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the Judiciary replacing Justice Jamson Karemani Karemera who until his recent elevation as Judge of the High Court was the serving PRO.



Office Supervisors called to serve with integrity

Office Supervisors from all over the courts held their annual meeting for the FY 2022/23 at the Judicial Training Institute (JTI) in Nakawa, Kampala to assess their performance and exchange ideas on how to serve the institution better.

This was presided over by the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana.





SEPTEMBER

Judiciary Holds 6th Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture

The Judiciary on September 21 held a sixth Annual Memorial Lecture in honor of the first Ugandan Chief Justice, Benedicto Kiwanuka at the

Judiciary headquarters under the theme “Enhancing Judicial Accountability, Transparency and the Rule of Law.” The fallen Chief Justice was kidnapped

51 years ago from his chambers at the High Court in Kampala never to be seen again.



PJ urges CMs to safeguard the image of the Judiciary

The Principal Judge, Dr. Flavian Zeija presided over a meeting with select Chief Magistrates at the Judiciary Headquarters in Kampala to review performance and enhance service delivery. The meeting was at the invitation of the Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu.

Justice Dr. Zeija emphasized the critical role Magistrates’ Courts play in the justice system, highlighting that they are often the first point of contact for the public seeking dispute resolution. Through their contacts and behavior, he urged the participant to place a high priority on upholding the Judiciary’s efficiency and good reputation.

DCJ Calls Upon CMs to serve with integrity

The Deputy Chief Justice, Richard Buteera, closed a 10-day residential induction of new Acting Chief Magistrates at Colline Hotel, Mukono where he called for timely delivery of Judgments/Ruling and urged them to shun corruption.

PJ Carries Out M&E exercises in select SGBV-implementing courts

The Principal Judge Dr. Flavian Zeija, was in Masindi and Nakasongola Courts to monitor the progress of the ongoing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence court sessions. He was accompanied by officials from the Governance and Security Programme.





OCTOBER

PJ launches PS Bigirimana's 'A Small Book of Big Quotes'

At the launch of Dr. Pius Bigirimana's new book, 'A Small Book with Big Quotes' at the Judiciary headquarters in Kampala, the Principal Judge, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, called for the need to celebrate local writers for their profound impact on literacy rates and the love for reading within the communities.



Nwoya gets first High Court Criminal Session

The Head of Gulu High Court Circuit, Justice Phillip Odoki, held a High Court Criminal Session in Nwoya where 40 cases arising from Amuru and Nwoya magistrates' courts were being handled. The month-long session handled Aggravated Defilement (20), Murder (18), Rape (11) and one Aggravated Robbery case. This effort was to achieve improved physical access to justice which fosters the realization of speedy trial.

SCP Registry Holds Annual Review Meeting

The Chairperson Small Claims Procedure (Implementation Committee, Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, chaired an annual review meeting for courts under Iganga High Court Circuit, at Kaliro Country Resort in Kaliro to share best practices, challenges and chart a way forward for improved performance.

While there, they discussed the need to submit accurate statistics for better assessment.

PJ engages inmates at Luzira Maximum Security Prison

The Principal Judge Dr. Flavian Zeija visited Luzira Maximum Security Prison to address issues affecting inmates facing capital charges. The engagement was organized by Avocats Sans Frontieres (ASF), the Austrian Development Agency, and LASPNET-U which have been key in coordinating platforms that advocate for the procedural rights of pre-trial detainees so that they can access timely justice.

Handbook On Refugee Access to Justice Launched

A cross-section of judicial officers, justice actors, and humanitarian advocates gathered at Mestil Hotel in Kampala to witness the launch of the Refugee Access to Justice handbook which was drafted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

The Launch was aimed at enhancing the awareness of stakeholders on refugee policies.

NOVEMBER

Archbishop Orombi Visits Mubende Courts

Retired Church of Uganda Archbishop, Henry Luke Orombi, made a stopover at Mubende High Court where he interacted and encouraged staff to serve the public diligently in line with Psalms 23 where God guarantees his presence amidst them. He appealed to the court users to share their grievances with the Head or other authorities at the Court for solutions.





Napak Residents sensitized on court processes

HW Emmy Sayekwo, Ag. Deputy Registrar Moroto High Court Circuit led a team of Judicial Officers in sensitizing communities in Napak District at Apeitolim Sub-county about the court processes and the formal justice system as a whole. This was to popularize the newly operationalized Napak Magistrates Court which is under the leadership of Magistrate Grade I, HW Juma Ssenoga.

Prison Authorities commend Kumi Magistrates

HW Winny Afoyorwoth Magistrate Grade I Kumi, joined a team from the Judicial Service Commission led by Ms Ogwang Gloria, a Senior Legal Officer, for a stakeholders' engagement at Kumi Government Prison and later a sensitization activity with the inmates. They were applauded by the Kumi OC Prison Mr Beka Ferdinand for the timely disposal of criminal cases and ensuring that the inmates on remand appear regularly in court

Lira High Court Circuit to Host Annual Northern Bar-Bench Dinner

Judicial Officers and Advocates from the greater north kicked off the 4th Annual Northern Bar-Bench Dinner activities in Lira starting with sports which was opened by Lady Justice Ikit Mary, the Resident Judge of Moroto.

The Annual Dinner took place at Margerita Hotel with the Chief Justice as the chief guest.

Criminal Division hosts medics

The Criminal Division hosted a group of 25 students of Masters' in Psychiatric degree, specializing in Forensic Psychiatry, from Butabika Hospital and Makerere University College of Health Sciences. The students were led by Dr. Apio Irene Wengi, a Forensic Psychiatrist at Butabika Hospital. They were taken through components of a criminal session by the Division's Deputy Registrar, HW Festo Nsenga. He also shared with them the importance of expert information when making medical reports that are needed in trial processes.



Tororo Resident Judge engages Stakeholders over reopening Lumino Court

The Resident Judge of Tororo High Court circuit, Justice Henry Isabirye Kawesa, inspected the former Lumino sub-county Grade II court located in Lumino Town Council, Busia District to assess the suitability of the court premises.

The Court had been operational since pre-independence but was closed in 2013. This he said is expected to bring services closer to the people and reduce case backlog at Busia Chief Magistrate's Court.

Aggravated Defilement Tops Nebbi High Court Criminal Session

A total of 24 cases of Aggravated Defilement were handled in a High Court Criminal Session at Nebbi Chief Magistrates Court presided over by Justice George Okello.

The session lasted 40 days with 50 cases handled. Of these, Aggravated Defilement accounted for nearly half of the case files, followed by Murder (21), Aggravated Robbery (4) and Aggravated Trafficking (1).

Chief Inspector Visits Masaka Courts

The Chief Inspector of Courts inspected Masaka High Court and Chief Magistrates Court where he interacted with members of the public and encouraged them to exercise patience towards the Judicial Officers who are handling a huge backlog.

He applauded the Officers for embracing Plea Bargaining to reduce the backlog in criminal cases.



CR, ULS Executive discuss how to improve Bar- Bench relations

The Chief Registrar, HW Sarah Langa Siu, held a meeting with the Uganda Law Society Executive in her chambers to discuss important matters and engage in dialogue regarding issues that affect collaborative efforts between the Bar and the Bench.

HW Langa briefed them on progress of the Performance Enhancement Tool, which will enable advocates and other court users to assess the performance of Judicial Officers as well as enhance transparency. This was welcomed by ULS which expressed readiness to



assess judicial officers and the quality of judgments. They also proposed the establishment of an anonymous hotline for advocates to address their grievances while maintaining anonymity.

Construction for Tororo High Court set to commence

A significant milestone in the justice system was achieved with a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of Tororo High Court which was presided over by the Resident Judge, Justice Henry Isabirye Kawesa.

The courthouse which billed at UGX2.97billion is located within Tororo Municipality adjacent to the Tororo District Local Government headquarters. M/S Eleven Steps Company Ltd was contracted to handle the construction of the ultra-modern court house use for two years.

DECEMBER

Murder cases dominate High Court Criminal Session in Kyangwali

A High Court Criminal Session kicked off at the Kyangwali Magistrates Court, where 42 cases were handled. Twenty four of the files were Murder cases.

The session was presided over by the Hoima High Court Resident Judge, Justice Jesse Byaruhanga Ruyema and was held with support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Alight and Refugee Law Project (RLP) in a bid to bring justice closer to the refugee community in Uganda.

Highlights of Kiboga High Court First Pre-Session, RCC meeting

Kiboga High Court under the leadership of Justice Jamson Karemani held joint pre-session and Regional Chain-linked Committee meetings for the newly operationalized High Court to interact and meet with the leaders of Kiboga and

Kyankwanzi Districts.

The pre-session briefed the stakeholders on the Court's criminal sessions where 40 cases were handled out of which, 23 were cases were involving juveniles.



DCJ delivers keynote speech on International Human Rights Day

At the commemoration of 75 years of the International Human Rights Day at the Kampala Sheraton Hotel, the Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Richard Buteera emphasized the need to take stock and examine what has been achieved since

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948.

The declaration serves as a guide for freedom and equality, safeguarding the rights of individuals globally.



I am glad to have served the Judiciary for 33 years - Ssenyonjo

As Herbert Ssenyonjo, Judiciary’s first Principal Librarian, signs out of the Judiciary having attained the mandatory retirement age, he looks back with nostalgia at the 33 years he has served the institution. He shares his experience...

When did you join the Judiciary?

I recall like it was yesterday, I joined on 15th May 1990 as a trainee librarian. At that time, the High Court Library was closed. I started out in the Supreme Court Library. To be specific, I’m a pioneer Librarian of the Supreme Court Library together with the late Justice Harold Platt. At the time, one of the courtrooms, at present-day Mengo Chief Magistrates Court, had been converted into a library.

I had graduated with a Social Sciences degree from Makerere University. I had done interviews with Public Service and was placed in the Judiciary as a trainee librarian. I was trained on the job and taken back to Makerere University to get a postgraduate diploma in Library and Information Science, which took me two years. I officially joined Public Service on permanent and pensionable terms in 1992.

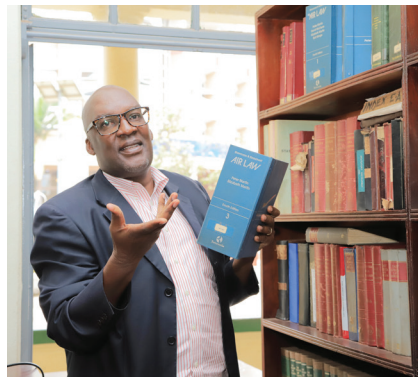
What does the Judiciary’s Librarian do?

At first, as a librarian, I received the reading materials that had been purchased. Initially, the Supreme Court depended on reading materials that had been donated. Justice Platt was a Commonwealth Judge so he helped in building that library. I used to receive books, conduct the accessioning (giving numbers to books), stamping, classifying and cataloging, and then shelving them according to their class number.

The Judiciary Library is a special library dealing in law matters; meaning that all



Mr. Herbert Ssenyonjo



the books here are related to law. We use codes related to administrative law, criminal law and the like to shelve the books.

Was it easy to adapt to this environment considering you didn’t have any legal background?

It wasn’t difficult because once you know the code, everything is simplified. There’s a code for different subjects, so, you would differentiate a criminal code from a civil and tax code. In essence, codes simplify every thing.

How did you come here [High Court] from the Supreme Court?

I was transferred to take charge of this Library in 2004 shortly after I was promoted to Senior Librarian making me the head of the libraries in the Judiciary.

It’s now over 30 years, how have the times changed?

When I joined, the whole Judiciary had no computers. Again, it was the late Justice Platt through the help of DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency) the library we acquired a donated computer. He (Justice Platt) brought in people to train us on how to use computers in the library. At the time, there was also no computer at the School of Library in Makerere. We were doing everything manually. The Late Timothy Kasoma, taught us a difficult programme called Word Perfect, a word processing application. That was before the invention of programmes like Microsoft Word.

Can you detail the people who helped in ensuring that the library is what it is today?

There was a Commonwealth Judge called Justice David Porter who reopened this library after its closure. He ensured that the library was re-organised and operational.

How is it like working with people coming in asking for books...?

It is okay, that’s our job. In fact, we are happy to receive people. Whether it’s a book or a law report, we know exactly where to get it given the codes.



Which criteria do you use to give out books...?

If you are a private person, you provide your ID card and we give you a book which you are required to read from within the library. We do not lend out books to outsiders, it's only Judicial Officers and the general Judiciary staff that can access the service.

Have there been instances where books get lost...?

Of course. One time we caught some students who put books in jackets after reading them, others pluck out pages or chapters when they have no money to photocopy. We call that vandalism because that's how we lose some information.

As you wind up your service in the Judiciary, what do you have to say?

This is where I have served all my working life and I have enjoyed it. This has been my home. I have enjoyed working with all the people, Chief Justices Samuel Wako Wambuzi, Benjamin Odoki, Bart Katureebe, and the current Chief Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo and their deputies. They have been parents to me.

I have maintained a clean record and I'm happy to go this way. I started with many of the current Justices. I have seen them grow. Some, we joined the Judiciary at the same time, for instance, Lady Justice Margaret Tibulya. Other Justices were students when I was a librarian and I used to help them. So I have witnessed them grow in their careers. When I came in, I was an energetic young man, but now I'm going out an older man.

I recently got a stroke and now I struggle with my speech. Even then, I am grateful to have worked at the Judiciary for the past 33 years. As I retire into farming, I do so while holding my head high. ■

My first eight months as Chief Magistrate of Yumbe/Koboko courts

When I picked my transfer letter from the Chief Registrar's Chambers in Kampala, to begin work in Yumbe and Koboko as the pioneer Chief Magistrate, I did not know what to expect.

First, I travelled to Arua High Court to report to the Deputy Registrar. Thereafter, I travelled to Kotido via Kamdini-Lira, my previous area of deployment and proceeded to hand over and move house.

The journey that took me the entire day left me in pain for nearly two days because of the long distance and bad roads.

Luckily for me, I had communicated with HW Ali Tibenkana, the Magistrate Grade I at the station, who secured for me rented premises, and that is where I live to date.

With accommodation sorted, I began my judicial work in Yumbe and Koboko on 1st July 2023. On reporting to office, the Magistrates Grade I at both courts handed over their offices to me.

All seemed well until 21st July when I faced a Plea Bargaining case, where an accused female was brought before court on charges of Infanticide contrary to Section 213 of the Penal Code Act. She had pleaded guilty and hoped to get a lenient sentence.

The facts read to her by the Prosecution stated that she had sliced her three-month-old infant into pieces, cooked some of the parts and ate them. The accused admitted to the facts being true and proceeded to admit how she found



By HW Awacnedi Freddie

Chief Magistrate, Yumbe and Koboko

her child's meat delicious. I could not believe what I heard and asked that a psychiatrist assesses her sanity before being convicted.

The psychiatrist's report from Yumbe Government Referral Hospital found that the convict was sane at the time of her act. She was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

I have also handled cases of violence involving weapons such as spears, pangas, bows and arrows which stem from unresolved land disputes and domestic violence. However, cases of defilement are rampant in both Magisterial Areas.

There is also a lot of backlog especially in land matters but with support from the Judiciary management, this will be handled. ■



Fare thee well Margaret Aanyu: Judiciary pays tribute to an astute Judicial Officer

In a solemn ceremony that unfolded in Bukedea Town Council, Bukedea District, Chief Magistrate Margaret Aanyu found her final resting place within the hallowed embrace of her ancestral homeland. The poignant event, came a week after her untimely demise due to a cardiac arrest—a tragic end to a short illness at Kampala Hospital, Kololo.

The farewell gathering brought together a diverse array of people from all walks of life, each person united in their shared admiration for the departed, recognising her as an exceptional leader, a tireless worker, and an embodiment of love.

The Principal Judge, Dr. Flavian Zeija, who presided as the chief mourner, articulated the profound loss suffered by the Judiciary, emphasising Aanyu’s indomitable spirit. Her legacy in the Judiciary, spanning her journey from her earliest days to her distinguished position at the time of her passing, left an indelible mark.

“In the Judiciary, particularly within the region, we have lost a towering figure. The late Margaret Aanyu was driven by an unwavering passion for her work. She often exceeded the limits to serve justice to the people of this country,” stated Dr. Zeija. “Covering four lower courts in the magisterial areas of Kumi, Serere, Katakwi, and Soroti, her workload was immense. She often toiled late into the night, ensuring that justice was served. She was not only hardworking but incorruptible, a true pillar in our Judiciary and a loss we keenly feel in the broader law and justice sector of our nation.”

The Late Magistrate Aanyu’s son, Ian Ekomoloit, painted a touching picture of his mother, describing her as a loving soul who cared deeply for people from



all walks of life. Her boundless affection for others endeared her to many, even when she meted out justice. He shared an anecdote about the prisoners in Soroti, who, upon learning of her passing, were moved to tears. This act of mourning was a rarity; given that one might expect them to resent her for the decisions that led to their incarceration. However, her compassion was such that she found a way to express her love, even when rendering judgments.

“On her passing, we were informed that some of the prisoners shed tears upon hearing the news. This is truly remarkable, as it’s uncommon for inmates to grieve the loss of the one who delivered their sentences. But

it was her love and dedication to her work that made her unique. She would administer punishment, and it was still appreciated, as it was clearly meant to transform them for the better,” he revealed.

Mr Onapito Ekomoloit, a respected journalist and chairman of Nile Breweries, had once been married to the late Magistrate, underscored the importance of respecting the last wishes of the departed and urged society to uphold this tradition. His words resonated with those in attendance, serving as a reminder of the reverence owed to the deceased.

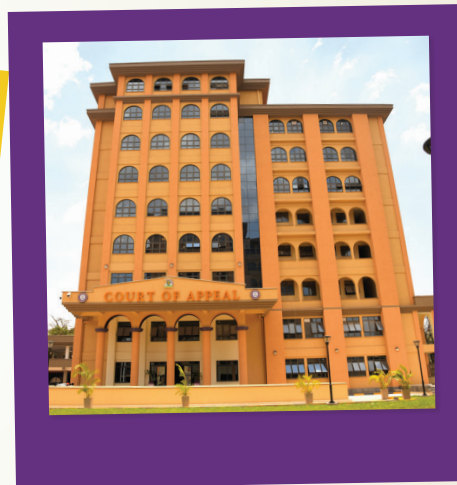
During the sermon, the priest, Msgnr Silver Opio, the Vicar for the Clergy, Soroti Catholic Diocese, implored the congregation to foster unity and justice within society, underlining their significance for the well-being of all. He encouraged the gathering to draw inspiration from the late Chief Magistrate’s exemplary life, emphasising the promotion of love for justice and freedom as core values worth upholding.


Additionally, Msgnr Opio called upon the community to prioritise environmental conservation, stressing the essential role of trees in providing the life-sustaining oxygen that all living beings require. These words of wisdom offered a final reminder of the interconnectedness of life and the enduring impact of a truly great soul like Chief Magistrate Aanyu. ■




THE JUDICIARY

COMMISSIONING OF THE SUPREME COURT AND COURT OF APPEAL BUILDINGS



 **Date:** Thursday,
April 18, 2024

 **Time:**
10:00am

 **Venue:** The Judiciary
Headquarters, Kampala

Guest of Honour:
H.E GEN. YOWERI KAGUTA MUSEVENI,
President of the Republic of Uganda



THE JUDICIARY

VISION: Justice for All

MISSION: to efficiently and effectively administer justice

CORE VALUES

INDEPENDENCE

the Judiciary will ensure that it operates freely in its own best Judgement, without taking directives from, or being controlled by, any person or authority. We will uphold and exemplify the independence of the Judiciary in its individual and institutional aspects.

IMPARTIALITY

We uphold that justice must not merely be done but must also be seen to be done. Judicial Officers shall perform judicial duties without fear, favour, ill-will, bias, or prejudice.

TRANSPARENCY

The Judiciary will be open at all times in dealing with all partners in the administration of justice, documenting its operations and freely disseminating information. The Judiciary will endeavour to win the confidence and trust of all Ugandans and the international community through the quality of its services.

PROFESSIONALISM

The Judiciary will endeavour to have well-trained, professionally competent and self-confident staff that will administer justice to all.

INTEGRITY

the Judiciary will carry out its activities in an honest and truthful manner, and will take all reasonable measures to prevent wilful wrongdoing by its officials. Our behaviour and conduct will re-affirm the people's faith in the integrity of the Judiciary.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Judiciary will take full responsibility for its actions, and will always be answerable to the people of Uganda and to its partners.

EQUALITY

The Judiciary will uphold the principles of equality, equal opportunities and affirmative action in respect to gender and other disadvantaged groups. We shall accord equal treatment to all persons who appear in court, without distinction on unjust discrimination based on the grounds of sex, colour, race, ethnicity, religion, age, social or economic status, political opinion, or disability.

TALK TO US:

The Judiciary: Plot 2, The Square,
P. O. Box 7085, Kampala-Uganda
Tel: +256 414 233 420/1/2/3

Toll Free: 0800 111 900/0800 225 587

www.Judiciary.go.ug

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