



THE JUDICIARY

INSIDER

Walking the Fields of Uganda's Oil Future

Judiciary Prepares for a New Era of Justice



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» My vision and the Judiciary I would aspire to have at the end of my term – **CJ Zeija**

» **SPECIAL SECTION:** Was the price Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka paid worth it?



Remembering the First
Ugandan Chief Justice
Hon. Benedicto Kiwanuka



PICTORIAL



HW Beatrice Stella Atingu, Registrar, Special Duties, representing the Chief Registrar (left), presents an enrolment certificate to a newly enrolled advocate as the advocate's parents look on at the Court of Appeal Conference Hall, Kampala, on June 12, 2026.



The Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija, signs a dummy book during the launch of Peer Committees for all courts, as the Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi (left), and the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, look on at the Supreme Court Conference Hall, Kampala on August 26, 2026.



The Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi (centre), cuts a cake with Judicial Officers, retired Judicial Officers and family members during the Court of Appeal Quarterly Luncheon held to welcome him to office on June 30, 2026



A cross-section of Judiciary Council members during their retreat at Lake Victoria Serena Golf Resort & Spa, Kigo, on July 2, 2026.



Justices of the Appellate Courts participate in a team-building exercise during their retreat at Brovad Sands Hotel, Kalangala, on July 15, 2026.



The Chief Registrar, HW Agnes Alum, joins Private Legal Secretaries, Personal Assistants, staff of the Communications and Public Relations Registry, and facilitators during a protocol training session at the Supreme Court Conference Hall, Kampala, on July 21, 2026.



Carrying Forward Kiwanuka's Vision: Making Justice for All a Living Reality

More than five decades after the disappearance of Chief Justice Benedicto Kagimu Mugumba Kiwanuka, the most meaningful way to honour his vision is clear: deliver justice to the people.

His abduction from his chambers at the High Court in Kampala on September 21, 1972, remains one of the darkest moments in Uganda's judicial history. His courage affirmed the independence of the Judiciary and fidelity to the rule of law. Today, those principles must translate into a justice system that works for everyone.

That is the imperative behind the theme of this special edition of The Insider Magazine: "Justice for All: Carrying Forward Benedicto Kiwanuka's Vision."

Justice for All is ultimately about delivery. It means that a person who comes to court can access justice, have their matter heard fairly and receive a timely resolution. Justice delayed, inaccessible or beyond the reach of those who need it cannot fully meet that promise.

This is why the Judiciary's reforms matter. Expanded court services, Alternative Dispute Resolution, mediation, plea bargaining, improved case management and technology are not ends in themselves. Their value lies in whether they make justice faster, more accessible, efficient and responsive to the people. The same test applies to judicial service. Independence, integrity, professionalism and courage matter because they safeguard the quality and credibility of justice delivered. Behind every case file is a person waiting for a decision that may affect their liberty, family, livelihood or future.

This edition documents a Judiciary pursuing transformation through reforms, innovation, stronger institutions and partnerships. But transformation must ultimately be measured not by the number of initiatives introduced, but by their impact on justice delivery.

Are cases resolved more promptly? Are courts easier to access? Are decisions fair and credible? Do court users experience justice with dignity?

These are the measures that give practical meaning to Kiwanuka's vision and that is the responsibility of our generation.

HW Agnes Alum

Chief Registrar/Editor-in-Chief

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Chief Registrar/Editor-in-Chief	HW Agnes Alum
Public Relations Officer	HW James Ereemye Jumire Mawanda
Principal Communications Officer/Editor	Sheila Wamboga
Copy Editors	Halimah Kaggwa (Senior Client Service Officer) Ruth Ashaba (Senior Communications Officer)
Special Contributors	Amb. Maurice Kagimu Kiwanuka, HW Daphine Ayebare, HW Margaret Wagana, HW Roseline Nsenge, HW Talisuna Patrick Ngeleza, Maxencia Kiwanuka, Josephine Kiwanuka and Regina Kiwanuka
Contributors	Abubaker Kagulire, Danielle Nalukenge, Evas Kobusingye Patience Kengoro, Rose Ampurira, and Rose Namanya,
Photography	Danielle Nalukenge (Multimedia Officer)
Design & Print	slickrep256@gmail.com



Mr Muhumuza, Stakeholder Management Officer at the Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU) (left), shows the Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija; Governor of the Bank of Uganda, Dr Michael Atingi-Ego; and Lady Justice Catherine Bamugemereire a sample of crude oil extracted from the oil fields during a briefing at Kabalega Resort, Hoima, on August 5, 2026.

Walking the Fields of Uganda's Oil Future: Judiciary Prepares for a New Era of Justice

As Uganda moves closer to First Oil, judicial officers have stepped beyond the courtroom and into the Albertine Graben to gain first-hand understanding of the projects, communities and environmental questions that could shape a new generation of disputes before the courts.



BY **DANIELLE NALUKENGE**
Multimedia Officer,
The Judiciary

For four days, Uganda's senior judicial officers exchanged courtrooms, files and legal submissions for oil fields, well pads, infrastructure projects, waste-management facilities and communities affected by petroleum. It was a historic undertaking.

Led by the Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija, the Judiciary embarked on its first study tour of Uganda's oil and gas sector in the Albertine Graben, bringing together

Justices of the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and High Court alongside officials from the Bank of Uganda, Uganda Revenue Authority, Petroleum Authority of Uganda and Uganda National Oil Company. But this was not a ceremonial excursion.

The four-day immersion was designed to give judicial officers practical knowledge of the petroleum industry, from infrastructure and environmental safeguards to community resettlement, as Uganda prepares for First Oil. The underlying objective was equally clear: judges who may one day determine complex petroleum-related disputes should understand the sector beyond what appears in pleadings, affidavits and expert reports.

Beyond the theory

The journey began at the Uganda Petroleum Institute Kigumba (UPIK), where the delegation was introduced to the human-capital side of Uganda's emerging petroleum industry.

UPIK Principal Bernard Ongodia described the Institute as a centre of excellence serving Uganda and the wider African region.

For the Chief Justice, the visit spoke directly to the purpose of the entire study. "We should not remain theoretical. It is important that we understand first-hand what is happening in sectors that are critical to the country's development," Justice Zeija said.

That philosophy, moving from theory to first-hand understanding, would define the four days.

The delegation also visited Hoima City Stadium, one of the major infrastructure developments taking shape in the region. National Council of Sports Chairperson Ambrose Tashobya told the delegation that the facility is among the projects being developed as Uganda prepares to co-host the Africa Cup of Nations in 2027.

Seeing the oil industry up close

As the study progressed, the delegation moved deeper into the infrastructure supporting Uganda's petroleum ambitions.

At Kabalega International Airport, the Chief Justice described the nearly completed facility as a strategic national asset that would support petroleum operations while contributing to the country's wider economic transformation.

The delegation was informed that the airport features a 3.5-kilometre runway within a five-kilometre airfield and had reached 98.8% completion.

At Well Pad 1, engineers took the judicial officers through drilling and metering

operations. What they saw offered a physical perspective on an industry often discussed through statistics, policy documents and public debate. "Many people say there is no oil left, but what we have witnessed tells a completely different story. There is enormous work taking place here," the Chief Justice observed.

The delegation later visited the Kingfisher Oil Waste Management Facility, where the environmental dimension of petroleum production came into sharper focus. The facility, the judicial officers were told, was commissioned to provide environmentally sound treatment and disposal of oil waste in accordance with international standards, with an investment of US\$6 million.

For judges, these were not merely technical details. Environmental compliance, waste management, infrastructure contracts and the competing interests surrounding major development projects could all potentially generate legal disputes. Understanding the context in which such disputes arise is therefore increasingly part of judicial preparedness.

Where oil meets the environment

The final day took the delegation to TotalEnergies EP Uganda's Tilenga

Project, including Jobi-Rii 5, one of the project's production fields. Environmental restoration became a major point of interest when the delegation visited Jobi-Rii 2. "Other than the monument, you cannot tell there was ever exploration here," Justice Zeija observed, commending the restoration undertaken at the site.

The Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi similarly reflected on the relationship between development and conservation, noting that oil development and environmental protection could co-exist while safeguarding tourism and biodiversity.

The delegation also interacted with Project Affected Persons and heard accounts relating to housing and livelihood support.

The encounter brought another dimension into focus: behind the pipelines, airports, production facilities and investment figures are communities whose land, livelihoods and everyday lives interact directly with petroleum development.

That human dimension could become particularly significant in future disputes involving compensation, resettlement, environmental protection and community rights.



The Chief Justice, Dr. Flavian Zeija; Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo; Justices of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal; and select Judges of the High Court listen to an instructor during a visit to the Uganda Petroleum Institute Kigumba (UPIK) on August 4, 2026.



A cross-section of Judicial Officers share an interactive moment during a visit to the Kingfisher Oil Field in Kikuube District on August 6, 2026.



A new judicial frontier

Perhaps the most consequential announcement of the tour came as the four-day study drew to a close. The Chief Justice unveiled plans for a specialised Environment and Infrastructure Division within the Judiciary.

“If a dispute arises, how do you adjudicate it when you don’t even know it? There is nothing as good as adjudicating in an area you understand well,” Justice Zeija said.

The proposed specialised Division signals recognition that Uganda’s changing economy is likely to present courts with increasingly technical and specialised disputes.

The Chief Justice said judicial officers needed a development-oriented mindset that allows them to appreciate major projects while remaining focused on delivering justice.

“As the Judiciary, we must have a development mindset. We are training judges to ensure they appreciate these projects and determine disputes in a manner that promotes justice while supporting the country’s development,” he said.

Justice and investor confidence

The study tour also opened a broader conversation about the Judiciary’s place in economic development.

Courts are traditionally viewed through the lens of dispute resolution and enforcement of rights. But in an economy attracting large-scale investment, the predictability, efficiency and fairness of the justice system can itself influence confidence. “People often view the Judiciary as a consuming institution, but the Judiciary is a critical pillar of economic development,” the Chief Justice observed.



Judiciary Top Management with officials from the Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU) and CNOOC in front of an oil rig at the Kingfisher Oil Field in Kikuube District on August 5, 2026.

Bank of Uganda Governor Dr Michael Atingi-Ego reinforced the connection, pointing to the importance of a predictable, fair and efficient Judiciary in safeguarding investments, resolving commercial disputes and maintaining confidence in Uganda’s economy.

Justice Mike Chibita, Chairperson of the Judicial Training Institute Governing Council, captured the practical value of the tour: “Seeing these projects enriches our appreciation of the issues that may one day come before our courts.”

Preparing Judges before the disputes arrive

That may ultimately be the defining significance of the Albertine Graben study. The Judiciary is preparing before the disputes arrive.

Petroleum development can raise complex questions touching on commercial agreements, infrastructure, taxation, land, compensation, environmental protection

and community interests. The four-day field study exposed judicial officers to petroleum operations, environmental safeguards and resettlement programmes, giving them context that could prove valuable when such issues eventually reach court.

For the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, the experience was particularly memorable. “This is the most satisfying journey I have ever taken as an adult. It has been extremely informative and enriching,” she said.

A Judiciary ready for first oil

Uganda’s journey towards First Oil is about more than extracting petroleum from beneath the Albertine Graben. It involves communities, investment, infrastructure, environmental protection, regulation and inevitably, the law.

The Judiciary’s study tour therefore represented an investment in institutional readiness. By walking through oil fields and infrastructure projects, observing environmental restoration and interacting with people affected by petroleum development, judicial officers were able to connect legal principles with the realities on the ground.

As the Chief Justice explained at the conclusion of the study: “This was not a luxury visit. It was a study visit intended to inform how we move forward as a Judiciary in supporting Uganda’s journey to First Oil and the continued development of the petroleum sector.”

The message from the Albertine Graben was consequently larger than oil.

It was about a Judiciary recognising that as Uganda’s economy evolves, the disputes arriving before its courts will evolve with it, and that informed justice requires more than knowledge of the law alone. ●



My vision and the Judiciary I would aspire to have at the end of my term – CJ Zeija

In this exclusive interview with Rose Ampurira, the Chief Justice, Dr Flavian Zeija, outlines his vision for a faster, accessible, digitally enabled and people-centred Judiciary founded on strong institutions, judicial independence and equal justice for all.

BY ROSE
AMPURIRA

Communications Officer,
The Judiciary



What is your vision for the Judiciary, and what defining institutional legacy would you like to leave at the end of your tenure?

My vision is to build a more efficient, accessible, accountable, people-centred and trusted Judiciary that delivers timely and quality justice to all Ugandans. My priority is to strengthen case management, reduce backlog and delays, improve supervision and inspection and introduce clear and measurable service standards through the Client Charter. I seek to have a Judiciary where court users receive timely hearings, decisions. Performance of the Courts should be continuously monitored and transparency, integrity and accountability should be firmly embedded in the delivery of justice.

Further, my vision is to take justice closer to the people and strengthen the institutional capacity of the Judiciary throughout Uganda. This includes expanding appellate services to the regions, recruiting adequate numbers of judicial and administrative staff, improving court infrastructure, strengthening Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), establishing the Africa

ADR Centre, and enhancing the wellbeing and professional development of judicial officers and staff.

At the end of my term I would want to leave behind a Judiciary that is faster, digitally enabled, accessible, transparent, responsive and institutionally sustainable, with systems and structures capable of continuing to deliver better justice long after my tenure. I strongly believe in the principle that strong institutions should outlive strong individuals.

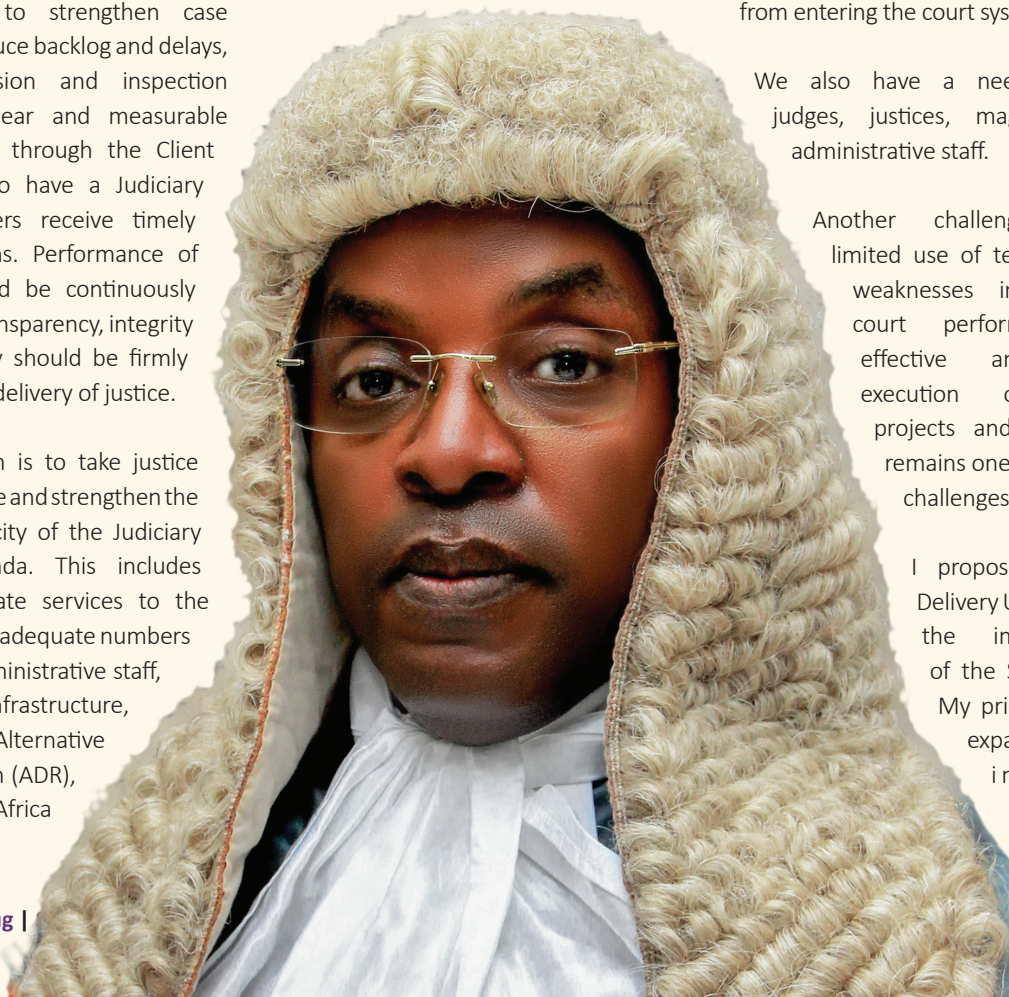
What are the most pressing challenges affecting the timely delivery of justice, and what practical reforms are you prioritising to address case backlog, staffing gaps, outdated procedures and weaknesses in project implementation?

The most pressing challenges facing the Judiciary are delays in case processing, inadequate staffing, weak implementation of projects, and outdated procedures. Delayed hearings and judgments are the major problems the Judiciary is facing. I would propose improving case-management practices, including a case-sieving system to prevent unsuitable cases from entering the court system.

We also have a need for more judges, justices, magistrates and administrative staff.

Another challenge is the limited use of technology and weaknesses in monitoring court performance. The effective and efficient execution of Judiciary projects and assignments remains one of our biggest challenges.

I propose creating a Delivery Unit to monitor the implementation of the Strategic Plan. My priorities include expanding ICT, introducing AI-powered





The Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavien Zelja (centre), receives an award recognising Uganda as one of the best-performing countries in Alternative Dispute Resolution during the Fourth Kenya Conference on Alternative Justice Systems, held from June 16 to 19, 2026.

transcription and promoting extensive use of the judgment-writing tool that was recently launched. My other priority is to establish a Situation Room to monitor court performance in real time. We have made good progress in this regard. I also propose introducing data-tracking dashboards and a performance-management system to ensure that judges, magistrates and staff are accountable for their work.

Conflicting judicial decisions are another challenge. They make it difficult to apply precedent consistently. My priority is, therefore, to harmonise legal positions and maintain consistency in the doctrine of precedent.

Case backlog remains a major challenge for the Judiciary. What practical measures do you intend to prioritise to

reduce case backlog and ensure timely delivery of justice?

Improving case management is a direct measure for reducing case backlog and delays. We are streamlining case-management procedures to shorten processing times and prevent delayed hearings and judgments. We are also introducing a case-sieving system at registration to keep unsuitable cases out of the court system.

We are also reviewing outdated procedural rules and we have increased the jurisdiction of magistrates, for example, Chief Magistrates can now preside over civil cases where the value of the subject matter does not exceed Shs200 million and Shs100 million for magistrates.

We are focusing at increasing judicial capacity and monitoring performance. We plan to recruit more justices, judges, registrars, magistrates and administrative staff so as to improve our human resource. Our emphasis is to have clear deadlines and alternative ways of disposing of cases. The Uganda Code of Judicial Conduct provides for delivering decisions within 60 days after hearing. This rule must be strictly followed.

Alternative Dispute Resolution has become an important component of justice delivery. How do you envision expanding ADR and making its services more accessible to court users across the country?

Uganda is hosting the Secretariat of the Africa ADR Centre. To establish a permanent and fully functional presence



in Uganda, there is need to construct a dedicated ADR Centre for Africa. I shall engage our stakeholders especially His Excellency the President to support and finance this undertaking, recognising the Centre as a strategic institution for strengthening Uganda's leadership in ADR on the continent.

My vision is to expand the use of ADR as an effective and accessible means of resolving disputes, thereby reducing unnecessary litigation and easing pressure on the courts. The Centre should provide court users and the wider public with greater access to mediation and other ADR mechanisms that are faster, less costly and more flexible than conventional litigation, while promoting amicable settlement of disputes.

The Centre should therefore become a hub for mediation, arbitration, training and innovation in ADR, with stronger linkages to the Judiciary and other justice-sector institutions.

By making ADR more accessible to court users and encouraging its use at appropriate stages of the justice process, we can resolve more disputes outside the formal trial process, reduce case backlog

“My vision is to build a more efficient, accessible, accountable, people-centred and trusted Judiciary that delivers timely and quality justice to all Ugandans.”

— Chief Justice Dr. Flavien Zeija

and promote timely delivery of justice. We have trained and shall continue to train and retool court accredited mediators who include politicians, retired civil servants, religious leaders, local leaders, retired and serving judicial officers and advocates.

I have no doubt that use of ADR will expand and more court users will access ADR services.

You have strongly advocated for a paperless Judiciary. What inspired this commitment, and what would a fully digital, paperless court system look

like in practice?

A central pillar of my vision is the digital transformation and modernisation of the Judiciary. I envisage a fully paperless, ECCMIS-driven court supported by reliable ICT infrastructure, virtual hearings, electronic archives, geographical information systems, performance dashboards and a central Situation Room providing real-time information on court operations.

I am also supportive of the responsible adoption of Artificial Intelligence in legal research, case management and judicial administration, accompanied by appropriate ethical safeguards and continuous training of judicial officers.

A paperless court is possible. At the Court of Appeal, we went paperless on 1st September 2025. All matters are lodged in court online. Court payments are made online. All court records are accessed online during preparations for court sessions. Court hearings are conducted online and court decisions are delivered online. The Supreme Court, like the Court of Appeal is also becoming paperless. This is what a paperless court should look like.

You have also expressed support for mobile courts. What role should they play in extending judicial services to people living in remote and underserved communities?

My vision for mobile courts is to take judicial services closer to people who face difficulties accessing established courts, particularly those living in remote and hard-to-access areas.

Mobile courts can take the justice system directly to communities, reducing the distance, transport costs and other practical barriers that prevent



Mr Lino Anguzu, Director of Public Prosecutions (Centre), at the closing of the Kiryandongo Mobile Court Session, where 145 cases were handled. This was on September 1, 2026.



people from pursuing or participating in court proceedings.

The mobile courts should therefore be used strategically in areas where access to formal court infrastructure is limited. By conducting hearings closer to affected communities, the Judiciary can make justice more accessible to ordinary court users, including people who may otherwise be unable to travel long distances to attend court. This approach would also demonstrate a Judiciary that is responsive to the needs and circumstances of the people it serves.

Mobile courts can further contribute to reducing case backlog and improving the timely disposal of cases by taking judicial officers and court processes to communities where cases are pending. They should form part of a broader access-to-justice strategy, complementing permanent courts while ensuring that geographical location does not become a barrier to receiving timely and effective justice.

People living in areas like Buvuma and other islands in Lake Victoria deserve mobile court services.

Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka is remembered for his commitment to justice, judicial independence, the rule of law and service to the people. What does his legacy mean to you, and how can the Judiciary translate his values into the everyday experience of court users?

The legacy of Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka represents a commitment to justice, integrity, equality and the rule of law. Kiwanuka's contribution to Uganda's legal and judicial history provides an enduring reminder that the Judiciary must remain independent, impartial and committed to serving all people. This is consistent with my own emphasis on judicial



The Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija, flagging off the Judiciary speedboat at Brovad Sands Resort, Kalangala, on March 28, 2026. The boat has helped to facilitate mobile court sessions on the islands.

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“At the end of my term I would want to leave behind a Judiciary that is faster, digitally enabled, accessible, transparent, responsive and institutionally sustainable... I strongly believe in the principle that strong institutions should outlive strong individuals.”

— Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija

independence, equal justice and integrity as essential foundations of judicial leadership.

His legacy should be kept alive as it is a mirror that keeps us reflecting on how best we can build a Judiciary that is accessible,

responsive and trusted by the public.

My commitment to expanding the presence of courts across the country, recruiting judicial officers and improving access to justice reflects my ambition to make the Judiciary more responsive to the needs of ordinary Ugandans.

Ultimately, keeping Justice Kiwanuka's legacy alive would mean strengthening a Judiciary founded on integrity, independence, equality and service to the people.

Lastly it is my intention to translate the lessons we learn from Benedicto Kiwanuka into practical reforms that improve the delivery of justice, fight corruption, reduce delays and ensure that every court user is treated fairly and with dignity.

My vision is therefore not merely to preserve a historical legacy of Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka, but to make its values meaningful in the everyday experience of those seeking justice. ●



DCJ Kawumi Sets Out His Vision for the Court of Appeal

In this special interview for the Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Magazine, Hon. Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi, speaks about his vision for the Court of Appeal, tackling case backlog, embracing technology and Alternative Dispute Resolution, strengthening public confidence in the courts, and the legacy of Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka.

BY ROSE AMPURIRA

Communications Officer,
The Judiciary



For the Deputy Chief Justice, Hon. Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi, leadership of the Court of Appeal is not simply about occupying one of the highest judicial offices in the country. It is a responsibility to make the Court more responsive, efficient and accessible to the people it serves.

His ambition is clear: A Court of Appeal where cases are concluded within six months, backlog falls below five percent, technology becomes integral to court business, ADR is embraced more widely, and appellate justice is progressively taken closer to Ugandans across the country.

At the heart of that vision is a principle that also defined the life and legacy of Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka — justice for all.

Q: What does your appointment as Deputy Chief Justice mean to you, and what are your priorities in this role?

DCJ: My appointment means added responsibility, particularly the responsibility of leading the Court of Appeal, which also sits as the Constitutional Court. It is not simply about holding the title. It means more work, being more thoughtful and



visionary, and strengthening my role as a team leader so that, as a Court, we remain focused on serving our clients better.

My priorities are aligned with those of the Judiciary as a whole. First, we must reduce case backlog. Second, we need to intensify the use of information technology, including ECCMIS, the Judgment Writing Tool and the other technological enablers that have been introduced.

Third, I want us to intensify the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in resolving appeals before the Court, both criminal and civil. Those are three of my major priorities.

Q: What is your vision for the Court of Appeal?

DCJ: I want to see justice for all reigning through the Court of Appeal.

My vision is of a Court where a matter does not take more than six months from the time it is filed to the delivery of judgment. I want a fully staffed Court, with the constitutional number of Justices appointed and adequate support staff.

I also want ADR to become an integral part of how we handle cases, as a first step before proceeding to a full hearing where appropriate. The Court should also be responsive to the people it serves. Complaints should be handled promptly, ideally within seven days.

Ultimately, I want a Court that is efficient, accessible and responsive to its users.

Q: Drawing from your experience in both the High Court and Court of Appeal, what needs to change to improve justice delivery in Uganda?

DCJ: Improving justice delivery cannot be the responsibility of the courts alone. Justice is a chain, and every institution within that chain must function effectively.

On the criminal side, for instance, Police must be adequately equipped to investigate cases. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions must have sufficient prosecutors to appear in court. Government laboratories need the personnel and resources necessary to support investigations. Within the Judiciary, we also need adequate numbers of Judges, Magistrates, Registrars and support staff.



The solution, therefore, is to appropriately resource the entire justice chain. If all the institutions involved in justice delivery are properly staffed and resourced, then we can achieve meaningful improvement in service delivery.

Q: Case backlog remains one of the major challenges facing the justice system. As Chairperson of the Case Management Committee, how do you intend to address it?

DCJ: The Case Management Committee brings together a wide range of stakeholders and advises the Chief Justice on measures that can improve justice delivery.

One area I would like us to strengthen is the use of ADR as a mechanism for reducing backlog, particularly given the resource constraints across the justice sector.

We also need to deepen the Alternative Justice System in regions where it has not yet reached and bring more institutions into the process of resolving disputes.

Another important intervention is reviewing procedural laws across all court levels. We should identify procedures that unnecessarily prolong cases without adding value and consider how they can be streamlined.

We also need to look at the distribution of manpower across the Judiciary so that Magistrates, Judges and Registrars are appropriately deployed according to need.

Finally, I want inspections intensified. There may be challenges in Police cells, Police stations, remand homes and other parts of the justice chain that can only be identified when we go out and inspect these institutions.



Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi, poses for a photograph with President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni shortly after being sworn in as Deputy Chief Justice at State House, Entebbe, on June 12, 2026.

Q: How can the Judiciary safeguard its independence while remaining accountable to the people it serves?

DCJ: Judicial independence and accountability are not contradictory.

Our independence is guaranteed by the Constitution and reinforced by the oath we take to serve the people of Uganda without fear or ill will. Accountability, on the other hand, requires the people we serve to understand what we do, how we do it and what results we deliver.

There is also a value-for-money dimension. The public provides resources to the Judiciary and should be able to see what those resources have produced.

When we publish our performance reports, that is accountability. When we hold Court Open Days and explain how the justice system works, that is accountability. Open court proceedings are accountability. When Judicial Officers go on radio and television to explain what the Judiciary does, that too is accountability.

The more people understand how the courts work, the stronger that accountability becomes.

Q: The Judiciary has increasingly embraced digital technology. How is it changing the administration of justice?

DCJ: Technology is already changing the way our courts work. ECCMIS has improved filing, report production, data collection and analysis. We have the Judgment Writing Tool for appellate courts, video conferencing facilities and recording equipment, among other interventions.

Technology is also making litigation less costly. A court user does not necessarily have to physically travel to court to file documents or track the progress of a case.

Video conferencing enables witnesses and other participants to take part in proceedings without necessarily being physically present in the courtroom.

The Judgment Writing Tool is also helping to make judgments clearer, shorter and easier for litigants to understand, while ECCMIS has made preparation of records for appeals easier and faster.

Overall, technology is improving the speed and efficiency with which cases are managed.



Q: What more can be done to make the Judiciary closer to ordinary Ugandans and strengthen public confidence in the courts?

DCJ: We must continue creating awareness about how courts and the justice system work.

When we go into communities and explain court processes, we take the Judiciary closer to the people. When we publish our performance reports, people understand what we are doing. Court Open Days, community barazas, radio programmes and television engagements all help to bridge the gap between the Judiciary and the public.

The conduct of Judicial Officers also matters. There was a time when the Judiciary was perceived as a very closed institution and Judges appeared distant from the public. That has changed over time. We are increasingly present in the public space, and that helps people understand that Judicial Officers are also part of the communities they serve.

Public confidence, however, ultimately depends on the justice we deliver. Timely, fair and realistic judgments build confidence in the justice system.

It is therefore about awareness, openness, proper reporting of our work and, most importantly, delivering justice fairly and within a reasonable time.

Q: Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka is remembered for his defence of the rule of law and judicial independence. What does his legacy mean to you?

DCJ: Whenever I think about Benedicto Kiwanuka, what comes to mind is his fidelity to the Constitution, his commitment to the rule of law and his aspiration for justice for all.

His legacy represents the courage to do what is right regardless of the circumstances.

Given the regime under which he served and ultimately lost his life, his story reminds us of the importance of standing for truth, justice and fairness.

That is what his legacy means to me.

Q: What legacy would you like to leave as Deputy Chief Justice?

DCJ: I would like to be remembered as a Deputy Chief Justice who always aspired for fairness in decision-making and who worked towards justice for all; including the poor, disadvantaged and children.

By the end of my tenure, I want the Court of Appeal to be able to deliver a judgment within six months from the time an appeal is filed.



“I do not want the Court of Appeal to become a warehouse for appeals”

— Hon. Justice Moses Kazibwe
Kawumi, Deputy Chief Justice

I want to see case backlog reduced to below five percent and a Court that is fully staffed, both in terms of Justices and support staff.

I also want a fully digital Court where processes can be undertaken online.

Beyond Kampala, I want appellate justice brought closer to the people. We are already developing Court of Appeal facilities in Mbarara and Gulu, and I would like to see the Court expand further to other parts of the country.

I do not want the Court of Appeal to become a warehouse for appeals. I want a properly functioning Court where a litigant who comes through our doors can have their matter resolved within six months.

That is the Court I would like to leave behind.

Q: Finally, what message would you like to leave with Ugandans and stakeholders in the justice sector?

DCJ: The Judiciary is at the tail end of the justice-delivery process. For us to serve Ugandans effectively, the entire chain must work.

We need better-resourced Police and investigations, stronger probation services, adequate remand homes for children, better prisons and properly facilitated Judicial Officers, Magistrates and support staff.

My appeal is that, as a country, we reorganise our planning so that the whole justice chain is adequately resourced and works coherently for the benefit of all Ugandans.

When every part of that chain functions effectively, we will be better positioned to deliver the justice that our people deserve. ●



Staff of the Communications and Public Relations Registry explaining the Registry's work to the Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi, during his inspection of exhibition stalls at the Third National Court Open Day at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, Kampala, on September 10, 2026.

3rd National Court Open Day: Public tipped on court processes, judicial reforms

From digital case filing and mediation to new court infrastructure and culturally rooted justice mechanisms, the 3rd National Court Open Day gave the public a closer look at the reforms transforming justice delivery in Uganda.



Educating the public about court processes and ongoing judicial reforms took centre stage at the 3rd National Court Open Day, held at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds on Thursday, September 10, 2026.

Held under the theme, “*Delivering*

Inclusive, Efficient and Effective Justice,” the event reaffirmed the Judiciary’s commitment to openness, accountability and people-centred justice.

Hundreds of members of the public attended the event, where the Judiciary showcased reforms aimed at strengthening access to justice. Among them was the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS), a digital platform that automates and tracks the different stages of a case.

More than 88 exhibitors participated, including the Judicial Service Commission, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Inspectorate of Government, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Uganda Police Force and Uganda Prisons Service. The institutions guided the public on their mandates, court procedures and services available across the justice chain.

Taking the courts beyond the courtroom

In an address delivered on his behalf by Deputy Chief Justice, Moses Kazibwe Kawumi, the Chief Justice, Dr Flavian Zeija, described the National Court Open Day as an important platform through which the Judiciary engages court users and justice-sector stakeholders.

He added that the event enables the public to interact with the courts outside the formal courtroom setting and obtain information about judicial services, court processes and mechanisms for resolving disputes.



The Chief Justice observed that a justice system cannot be truly inclusive if people do not understand it, cannot access it or do not feel empowered to engage with it. “We shall continue to strengthen this culture of openness and accountability because the courts belong to the people of Uganda,” he said.

The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, explained that the initiative is grounded in the Constitution and reflects the Judiciary’s responsibility to serve and remain accountable to the people.

Bringing justice closer

The Chief Justice highlighted the Judiciary’s continued investment in infrastructure, including the Judiciary Headquarters, which houses the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal; the regional Courts of Appeal under construction in Gulu and Mbarara; and several High Court Circuits undergoing construction and renovation.

He also pointed to the Alternative Justice System Strategy, launched in June 2023, which incorporates appropriate cultural and customary values into the justice system.

“Through this approach, we are expanding opportunities for people to resolve disputes through mechanisms



“A justice system cannot be truly inclusive if people do not understand it, cannot access it or do not feel empowered to engage with it.”

— Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija



Judiciary mascots, accompanied by the Uganda Prisons Service Band, take part in the procession along Kampala Road to Kololo Ceremonial Grounds during the Third National Court Open Day on September 10, 2026.



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (centre), was the Chief Walker during the procession to Kololo Ceremonial Grounds for the Third National Court Open Day on September 10, 2026.



A bear mascot representing the Court of Appeal/Constitutional Court takes part in the procession to Kololo Ceremonial Grounds during the Third National Court Open Day on September 10, 2026.



The Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi, delivers his remarks during the Third National Court Open Day at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, Kampala, on September 10, 2026.

that are less expensive, more timely and, where appropriate, more reconciliatory than conventional litigation,” he said.

Stakeholders welcome the initiative

Ms Beate Farukuoye, Deputy Head of the Austrian Development Cooperation, commended the Judiciary for institutionalising the National Court Open Day as a platform for public engagement, information-sharing and stronger relations with the communities it serves.

“We look forward to continued collaboration in promoting an inclusive, accessible and effective justice system for all,” she said.

Mr Augustine Kizito Mutumba, head of the clan chiefs in Buganda, said the event had improved their understanding of court procedures and judicial reforms. He particularly welcomed the revitalisation of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms.

“I thank the Judiciary for reintroducing ADR mechanisms because they are well rooted in our cultures,” he noted.



The Hon. Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi (right), and Justice Dr Douglas Singiza Karekora, Chairperson of the Judicial Service Commission, listen as a Buganda Kingdom exhibitor explains traditional African and Alternative Dispute Resolution methods, commonly known as “kulamuzza,” during the Third National Court Open Day.



The Buganda Kingdom exhibition stall showcased traditional methods of resolving disputes within communities and the Kingdom as part of African and Alternative Dispute Resolution during the Third National Court Open Day.

Dr Aisha Bukenya of Mavid Pharmaceuticals shared the practical impact of mediation, explaining that it had helped resolve a dispute that had remained in court since 1995. “I thank the Judiciary for strengthening mediation. This has helped us resolve our dispute, which had been in court since 1995. However, I appeal to the Judiciary to ensure that these innovations are not compromised,” she said.

The 3rd National Court Open Day enabled

the public to engage directly with judicial officers, court administrators and justice-sector institutions. It also allowed the Judiciary to explain its reforms, demonstrate its services and receive feedback from the people it serves.

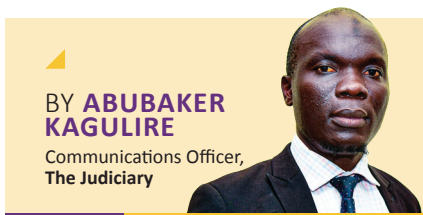
The event underscored that access to justice requires not only the presence of courts, but also a public that understands the justice system, knows where to obtain assistance and feels empowered to engage with it. ●



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (centre), hands over mediation instruments to Judicial Officers of the Commercial Division of the High Court during the launch of the Banking, Loan and Credit Mediation Fortnight on May 18, 2026.

Mediation at Work: Commercial Division Unlocks Shs90.6 Billion Back into the Economy

From settling a Shs5.29 billion banking dispute to resolving a six-year-old commercial case, the Commercial Division's mediation drive is demonstrating how Alternative Dispute Resolution can reduce case backlog, preserve business relationships and release billions of shillings tied up in litigation back into productive



economic activity.

When a commercial dispute enters court, it is not only a case file that remains pending. Money can be tied up, business relationships strained, investment decisions postponed and enterprises left counting the cost of prolonged litigation.

For the Commercial Division of the High Court, this reality has provided added impetus to embrace mediation — not simply as an alternative to litigation, but as an increasingly important

part of effective case management and Uganda's broader economic development.

The results are significant.

Through a mediation initiative focusing on banking, loan and credit disputes, the Division unlocked disputes with a combined subject matter value of Shs90,679,060,954. A total of 527 mediation causes were cause-listed and 417 completed, representing a 79.73 percent completion rate. Of the completed matters, 97 were successfully settled.

For the parties involved, the settlements meant more than closing court files. They provided an opportunity to avoid prolonged litigation, reduce legal costs, preserve commercial relationships and

realise business outcomes more quickly.

For the wider economy, they meant billions of shillings previously tied up in disputes could once again be put to productive use.

A Targeted Drive for Commercial Justice

The initiative began with the Commercial Division's Mediation Fortnight, held from 18 to 29 May 2026, specifically targeting banking, loan and credit-related disputes.

Its objectives were clear: fast-track disputes within the sector, promote Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), reduce commercial case backlog, improve access to justice, lower litigation costs and facilitate timely disposal of cases so that funds held up in disputes could be released.

But the work did not stop when the fortnight ended.

Mediation continued under the 60-Day Mediation Rule, giving parties further opportunity to negotiate settlements and allowing the Division to continue disposing of eligible commercial disputes through Court-Annexed Mediation.

The approach paid off.

At an exit meeting held at the Supreme



Best-performing mediators are recognised during the exit meeting of the Banking, Loan and Credit Mediation Fortnight on July 24, 2026.

Court on 24 July 2026 to review the outcomes of the exercise, the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, commended the Commercial Division for demonstrating that mediation is not merely an alternative to litigation but an integral component of effective case management.

She said the Judiciary's ambition is to move beyond periodic settlement fortnights and make mediation part of the ordinary business of the courts.

"I want to thank the Commercial Division for leading us through this and showing us that it is not about justification. With time, we want to stop these settlement fortnights and let mediation become the usual business of case management," she said.

It is a vision that could fundamentally change the way suitable disputes are handled — shifting mediation from an occasional intervention to an established stage in the management of cases.

417 Cases Completed

Presenting the performance report, the Head of the Commercial Division, Justice Anna B. Mugenyi, said 527 mediation causes were cause-listed, with 417 completed.

Of these, 92 matters were fully settled and five partially settled, resulting in 97 settlements.

The exercise was a substantial collaborative undertaking involving 23 Judges, Registrars and accredited mediators.

The results strengthened one of the central arguments for mediation: commercial justice need not always end with a winner and loser after years of adversarial litigation. Where circumstances permit, parties can negotiate solutions that address their interests while saving both time and money.

Justice Mugenyi highlighted that the settlements enabled business people to avoid lengthy court battles, reduce legal costs, preserve commercial relationships and recover funds that would otherwise have remained locked in disputes.

The Division's report similarly identifies the reduction of pending mediation files, increased awareness and use of Court-Annexed Mediation, and enhanced collaboration among Judges, Registrars, mediators, advocates and the banking sector among the initiative's key achievements.

Shs5.29 Billion Dispute Settled

The impact becomes even clearer when viewed through the individual cases resolved.

The highest-value case successfully

settled during the reporting period was a dispute between Bank of India (Uganda) Limited and Qualicoff (U) Ltd.

The case involved Shs5,292,500,000.

Filed on 24 April 2026, the dispute was fully settled through mediation and closed on 25 June 2026 — 82 days from filing to completion.

Instead of potentially spending years in litigation over more than Shs5 billion, the parties were able to reach an amicable resolution within months.

Another banking dispute, involving Absa Bank and valued at Shs56,556,971, was completed even faster. Filed on 29 April 2026, it was fully settled and closed on 29 May — just 30 days later.

For a justice system seeking to improve efficiency and businesses seeking certainty, such timelines demonstrate what successful mediation can achieve.

Six Years of Litigation Ended Through Mediation

Perhaps one of the strongest illustrations of mediation's potential came from a high-value backlog matter that had originated in 2020.

Six years later, the dispute was referred to mediation.

The mediation case was registered on



23 April 2026 and concluded on 25 June 2026, with the parties agreeing to fully settle the matter. The subject matter was valued at US\$2,164,209, and the mediation process took 89 days.

A dispute that had remained unresolved for six years was therefore brought to an end within months through mediation.

The case illustrates another important dimension of ADR: it can tackle not only newly filed cases but also longstanding matters contributing to case backlog.

Every old case successfully mediated removes a matter from the court docket, frees judicial time for disputes requiring adjudication and, importantly, allows the parties to move on.

Commercial Justice and the Economy

The **Shs90.6 billion** figure tells a broader story about the relationship between justice and economic activity.

Money involved in commercial litigation may represent working capital, loans, investments, secured assets or other resources that businesses and individuals cannot freely deploy while disputes remain unresolved.

The quicker those disputes are resolved, the sooner resources can potentially return to productive economic activity.

The Governor of the Bank of Uganda, Dr Michael Atingi-Ego, emphasised that the role of the Commercial Court should therefore go beyond concluding cases with costs judgments.

He observed that the Court should provide practical solutions capable of restoring public confidence in both the justice system and the country's institutions.

That perspective places commercial justice squarely within the broader economic development conversation.

An efficient court does more than dispose of cases. It creates certainty. It gives businesses confidence that disagreements can be resolved within reasonable timelines. And when commercial relationships can be preserved rather than destroyed through adversarial proceedings, enterprises have a better chance of continuing to transact after a dispute has ended.

The Human Side of Commercial Disputes

Behind the billions are also individuals.

Commercial cases may involve a bank and a borrower, two companies, business partners, shareholders, suppliers or investors. Whatever the configuration, prolonged litigation has consequences.

Legal costs accumulate. Relationships deteriorate. Assets may remain unavailable. Management attention is diverted from running businesses towards managing disputes.

Mediation offers a different conversation.

Rather than asking only who should win, it creates space for parties to consider whether there is a solution they can both live with.

That does not mean every dispute can or should be settled. Indeed, the Commercial Division's results show that many matters did not result in settlement. But where agreement is possible, the process can offer parties greater control over the outcome than traditional litigation.

What Stands in the Way?

The mediation drive also revealed practical challenges that could limit its effectiveness if left unresolved.

Among them was non-attendance by parties and advocates, which resulted in delays and adjournments. Some commercial and banking disputes were also too complex to be concluded within the anticipated mediation period.

Another recurring challenge was that some representatives arrived at mediation without sufficient authority to make settlement decisions.

For banking disputes, this could mean that officials participating in negotiations were unable to approve a settlement or consent on behalf of their institutions. In some cases involving international banks, decisions had to be referred to headquarters outside the country, further slowing negotiations.

The report also identifies limited commitment to settlement by some institutions, procedural delays and concerns relating to foreclosure processes among the difficulties encountered by mediators.



“With time, we want to stop these settlement fortnights and let mediation become the usual business of case management.”

— Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, Principal Judge



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, signs the visitors' book at the Commercial Division of the High Court during the launch of the Banking, Loan and Credit Mediation Fortnight on May 18, 2026. Looking on is the Head of the Commercial Division, Lady Justice Anna Mugenyi (L) and Lady Justice Susan Abinyo, Deputy Head of the Commercial Division.

These experiences point to an important reality: mediation works best when the people sitting around the table are prepared to negotiate and have the authority to make decisions.

Giving Mediators the Right People at the Table

To address the challenges, the Commercial Division has recommended several reforms.

Banks should send representatives with full settlement authority to mediation sessions. The establishment of dedicated bank mediation officers has also been proposed to enable faster decision-making.

Other recommendations include continued sector-specific mediation drives, greater public awareness, monthly mediation review meetings, early referral of deserving cases to mediation, increased cooperation from advocates and stronger oversight and transparency in foreclosure processes.

Taken together, the recommendations point towards a more systematic approach in which mediation is considered early rather than after parties have already spent years litigating.

From Special Intervention to Normal Business

For years, settlement fortnights have demonstrated what courts can accomplish when judicial officers, mediators, advocates and litigants concentrate their efforts on resolving cases amicably.

The next challenge is institutionalisation.

The Principal Judge's call for mediation to become "the usual business of case management" captures the direction in which the Judiciary wants to move.

Instead of waiting for a special fortnight, suitable cases could routinely be identified and referred to mediation early in their lifecycle. Cases that can be settled would leave the litigation track sooner, allowing Judges to devote more time to matters that genuinely require judicial determination.

The Commercial Division's experience offers evidence for that transition.

The mediation drive and the subsequent 60-day period significantly enhanced the resolution of banking, loan and credit disputes, an achievement the Division attributes to the diligence of

the Judges and accredited mediators who participated.

When Justice Keeps Business Moving

Ultimately, the success of commercial mediation cannot be measured by numbers alone.

Yes, 417 matters were completed. Ninety-seven were settled. More than Shs90.6 billion was unlocked.

But behind those statistics are court cases brought to an end, parties spared further legal costs, business relationships given a chance to survive and resources released from disputes.

That is where mediation's wider value becomes apparent.

For the Judiciary, it means fewer cases competing for limited judicial time.

For litigants, it means an opportunity for faster and less adversarial resolution.

And for the economy, it means capital that might otherwise remain trapped in prolonged litigation can be released to support business and investment.

The Commercial Division's experience therefore makes a compelling case for the Judiciary's broader ambition: mediation should no longer be viewed simply as an alternative way of resolving disputes. It should increasingly become part of the ordinary way justice is delivered.

Because when a commercial dispute is resolved efficiently, the impact does not necessarily end at the courtroom door.

Businesses move forward, resources are released, relationships can be restored — and the economy keeps moving. ●



Right Case, Right Court: New Directions Put Expanded Magistrates' Court Jurisdiction into Practice

The new Practice Directions provide an orderly framework for transferring civil cases from the High Court to magistrates' courts following the expansion of their jurisdiction under the Magistrates Courts (Amendment) Act, 2026.

The Judiciary has taken a decisive step towards implementing the expanded jurisdiction of magistrates' courts by issuing Practice Directions to guide the transfer and management of affected civil case files.

The Constitution (Transfer and Management of Case Files) (Practice) Directions, 2026 were issued by the Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija, on July 30, 2026, under Article 133(1) (b) of the Constitution. They were published in the Uganda Gazette on August 21, 2026.

The Directions operationalise the Magistrates Courts (Amendment) Act, 2026, which substantially reformed the structure, powers and jurisdiction of magistrates' courts.

Under the amended law, a Chief Magistrate's Court has civil jurisdiction where the value of the subject matter does not exceed 10,000 currency points—equivalent to Shs200 million. A court presided over by a Magistrate has jurisdiction over civil matters whose value does not exceed 5,000 currency points, equivalent to Shs100 million.

The Practice Directions consequently provide a structured process for identifying and transferring eligible cases from the High Court to Chief Magistrates' Courts or Magistrates' Courts. They also guide the reallocation



Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija

of cases from Chief Magistrates' Courts to Magistrates' Courts.

At the heart of the reform is a simple but important principle: the right case should be heard by the right court.

A major reform of the magistracy

The Magistrates Courts (Amendment) Act, 2026 received presidential assent on April 29, 2026 and came into force on May 8, 2026.

Its purpose is to increase the pecuniary jurisdiction of magistrates' courts, enhance the powers of magistrates to impose higher fines, abolish the position of Magistrate Grade II, provide for the designation of magisterial areas and establish transitional arrangements for

cases affected by the new jurisdictional structure.

The Act reorganises the ranks of magistrates into two categories: Chief Magistrate and Magistrate. References to "Magistrate Grade I" in existing laws are replaced with "Magistrate", while references to "Magistrate Grade II" are removed.

It also empowers the Chief Justice, acting on the advice of the Judiciary Council, to designate magisterial areas and magistrates' courts by statutory instrument. This provides greater flexibility in organising court services in response to population, caseload and access-to-justice needs.

Jurisdiction expanded to Shs200 million

One of the Act's most consequential reforms is the expansion of the civil jurisdiction of magistrates' courts.

A Chief Magistrate may now determine a civil matter where the value of its subject matter does not exceed 10,000 currency points, equivalent to UGX200 million.

A Magistrate may handle a civil dispute whose subject matter does not exceed 5,000 currency points, equivalent to Shs100 million.

The increased limits mean that a wider range of civil disputes can be determined



at the magistrates' court level. This is expected to improve the distribution of cases across the court system, reduce pressure on the High Court and enable more litigants to access justice closer to their communities.

From legislation to implementation

The Amendment Act expressly provides for the transfer of pending cases affected by the revised jurisdictional limits.

It requires cases pending before the High Court that would now be triable by a Chief Magistrate to be transferred where the hearing has not commenced or where the High Court considers the transfer fair.

Similarly, cases pending before either the High Court or a Chief Magistrate that now fall within the jurisdiction of a Magistrate may be transferred to a court presided over by a Magistrate, provided the hearing has not commenced or the transferring court considers the transfer fair.

The Act directed the Chief Justice to issue Practice Directions regulating those transfers. The 2026 Practice Directions therefore provide the administrative machinery needed to implement the reforms.

They explain how cases are to be identified, appraised, classified, transferred, received, registered, allocated and monitored without prejudicing litigants or compromising the integrity of court records.

The Directions apply to civil matters before the High Court, Chief Magistrates' Courts and Magistrates' Courts. They do not apply to cases pending before the High Court on appeal from Chief Magistrates' Courts or Magistrates' Courts.



The Constitution (Transfer and Management of Case Files) (Practice) Directions, 2026 were issued by the Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija, on July 30, 2026, under Article 133(1)(b) of the Constitution. They were published in the Uganda Gazette on August 21, 2026.

Which cases may be transferred?

A civil case may be transferred from the High Court where it falls within the jurisdiction of a magistrate's court and its hearing has not commenced.

The High Court may also transfer a case where it is satisfied that doing so would be fair. Before such a transfer is made, the parties must be notified and the record of proceedings must be typed and certified.

Cases at an advanced stage will not be transferred. These include matters pending judgment; cases in which the plaintiff has closed their evidence or the defence hearing has commenced; matters awaiting submissions; and cases where a consent judgment is pending adoption.

These safeguards are intended to prevent disruption, duplication and unnecessary delay in matters already approaching conclusion.

Similar principles apply to the transfer or reallocation of cases from Chief

Magistrates' Courts to courts presided over by Magistrates.

Careful appraisal before transfer

Registrars in charge of High Court Divisions and Circuits are required to examine pending civil case files and establish the value of the subject matter, cause of action and stage of the proceedings.

Safeguarding litigants and existing proceedings

The Practice Directions contain several safeguards to protect parties whose cases are transferred.

A litigant will not be required to pay additional filing fees solely because the case has moved to another court. Any interlocutory order issued before the transfer will remain in force unless it is varied or set aside by the receiving court.

All applications arising from the principal case must accompany the main file. The entire record must be transferred, including pleadings, proceedings, orders, exhibits, lists of exhibits, security deposits and interlocutory applications.

Cases with urgent, unconcluded interlocutory applications must remain before the relevant High Court Division or Circuit until those applications have been heard and concluded.

For part-heard cases transferred in the interests of justice, the receiving magistrate may adopt the evidence previously recorded or order that the hearing commence afresh. Where a fresh hearing is ordered, the magistrate must give reasons and set clear timelines.

This is consistent with the Amendment Act, which provides that a court receiving a transferred or withdrawn matter may



either retry it or continue from the stage at which it was transferred, subject to any directions contained in the transfer order.

An accountable chain of custody

Transferring a case involves more than moving a physical file. Pleadings, proceedings, exhibits, applications, court orders, security deposits and electronic records must all move together without compromising the continuity of the case.

Before dispatch, the transferring court must place a transfer order on each file and prepare a registry transmission minute showing its contents and page count.

A detailed transmission list or dispatch register must also be prepared. It must capture the original case number, parties, nature and value of the claim, stage of the proceedings, receiving court, advocates' contacts and particulars of the court official receiving the file.

Transferred files must be dispatched through court process servers, court clerks or other designated court staff. The dispatching and receiving officers must acknowledge the handover and record the date and time of receipt.

This documentary trail strengthens accountability and reduces the risk of files being lost, delayed or transferred without essential documents.

Bridging manual and electronic systems

The Directions recognise that Judiciary stations currently operate different case-management systems, including physical registers, the Court Case Administration System and the Electronic Court Case Management Information System.

Where both the transferring and

receiving courts use ECCMIS, the case must be transferred electronically and the relevant records updated.

Where an electronically managed case moves to a court operating a manual register or the Court Case Administration System, a physical case file must be compiled and transmitted.

Where a case moves from a manual system to an ECCMIS court, the receiving court must scan the physical record, register it electronically and assign a new case number.

The original High Court or Chief

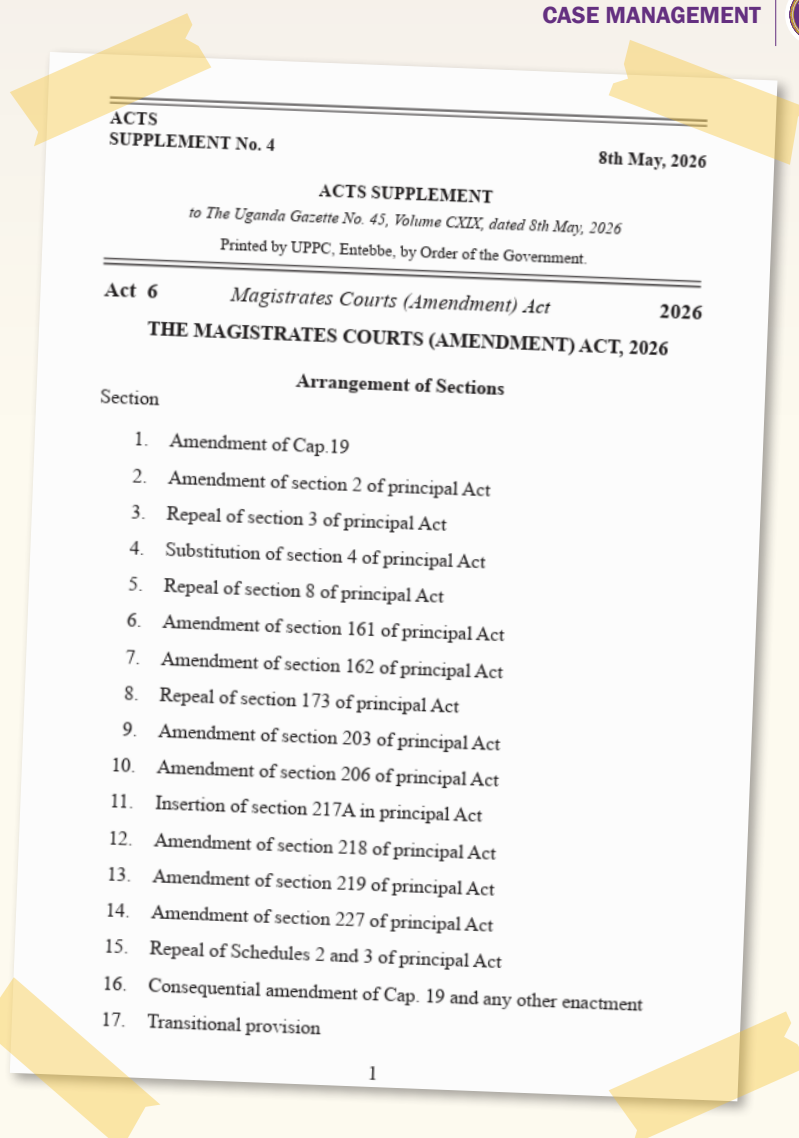
Magistrate's Court number must remain in the case history, creating a clear link between the old and new records.

Keeping litigants informed

Communication with the parties is required at every critical stage.

The transferring court must issue written notice identifying the court to which the case has been transferred. A copy of the notice must remain available for inspection at the registry.

Upon receiving the file, the new court must issue hearing or mention notices to all parties within five days. The notices





must state that the case has been transferred and quote both the old and new case numbers.

The receiving Chief Magistrate or Magistrate must then immediately allocate the file to a judicial officer for directions and the fixing of a mention or hearing date.

These requirements are intended to prevent transferred cases from falling into administrative uncertainty and ensure that litigants know where and when to pursue their matters.

A 40-day implementation window

The Practice Directions establish a firm implementation period. Cases identified for transfer from a High Court Division or Circuit to a Chief Magistrate's Court or Magistrate's Court must be transferred within 40 days from the date the Directions were published in the Gazette.

Cases identified for transfer or reallocation within magistrates' courts must also be handled within the same period.

The timeline places an immediate responsibility on Heads of High Court Divisions and Circuits, Registrars, Chief Magistrates and registry staff to appraise pending cases, prepare transfer orders, notify parties and complete the physical or electronic movement of the files.

Monitoring the transition

The Chief Registrar is responsible for periodic monitoring and verification of compliance with the Practice Directions.

The monitoring process will examine whether cases were properly classified, transferred to the appropriate courts, received and registered, and allocated for hearing within the prescribed period.



HW Alum Agnes, Chief Registrar



The High Court and Chief Magistrates' Court registries are required to maintain monitoring lists tracking the receipt, registration, allocation and fixture of every transferred case.

Any gaps identified must be documented, accompanied by recommendations and submitted to the Principal Judge for appropriate action. Disputes arising from implementation of the Directions must also be referred to the Principal Judge.

The High Court and Chief Magistrates' Court registries are required to maintain monitoring lists tracking the receipt, registration, allocation and fixture of every transferred case.

A broader transformation of magistrates' courts

Beyond civil jurisdiction and case

transfers, the Amendment Act introduces other significant reforms.

It abolishes the rank of Magistrate Grade II and consolidates the magistracy into the ranks of Chief Magistrate and Magistrate. It also increases the level of fines that may be imposed by Magistrates from 240 currency points to 500 currency points.

Together, these changes strengthen the role of magistrates' courts as the principal point of contact between the public and the formal justice system.

The expanded civil jurisdiction enables more disputes to be resolved at lower court levels.

Bringing justice closer to the people

The Practice Directions are not merely an administrative mechanism for moving files. They are the practical bridge between the legal reforms enacted by Parliament and their implementation across the court system.

By empowering Chief Magistrates to determine civil matters valued up to Shs200 million and Magistrates to handle claims valued up to Shs100 million, the Amendment Act distributes judicial work more broadly across the courts.

The transfer framework should ease pressure on the High Court, improve the use of available judicial officers and enable more cases to be heard closer to the communities where litigants live.

Its success, however, will be measured by more than the number of files transferred. Court users will judge the reform by whether they receive timely information, whether records reach the correct courts intact and whether transferred cases are promptly allocated and fixed for hearing. ●



Inside The Criminal Division: Turning Teamwork, Data and Technology into Faster Justice

With a 130.24 percent clearance rate, the Criminal Division of the High Court is disposing of more cases than it receives. But with more than 2,000 cases still pending, the Division is looking beyond the numbers – to teamwork, technology, plea bargaining and smarter case management to accelerate criminal justice.



BY ROSE
NAMANYA

Communications Officer,
The Judiciary

Beyond the statistics

When the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, sat down with Judges and Registrars of the Criminal Division of the High Court in July, the conversation was not simply about how many cases had been concluded.

It was about what the numbers meant, what stood behind them and, perhaps more importantly, what needed to change to deliver justice more efficiently.

The performance engagement provided space for one-on-one interactions with judicial officers, an assessment of individual and institutional performance, and candid discussions about the everyday realities affecting case disposal.

During the Financial Year 2025/26, the Criminal Division handled 3,976 cases and concluded 1,766. Its clearance rate stood at an impressive 130.24 percent; meaning it disposed of more cases than the 1,356 new cases registered during the year. At the end of the reporting



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, observes as Justice Isah Serunkuma explains his case-handling process in his chambers at the Criminal Division of the High Court, while Justice David Matovu looks on, on January 27, 2026.

period, 2,210 cases remained pending, including 581 backlog cases.

Lady Justice Abodo commended the judicial officers for their resilience and for maintaining strong performance despite the demanding environment in which the Division operates. She particularly recognised judges handling complex public interest cases, whose work can involve lengthy hearings, extensive evidence and considerable judicial time.

Presenting the Division's performance, the Head of Division, Justice David Matovu, explained that the 3,976-case workload comprised 2,620 cases brought forward and 1,356 newly registered cases. The Division concluded

1,766 cases, giving it a 44.42 percent disposal rate and a 130.24 percent clearance rate.

Justice Matovu attributed the performance to deliberate case management interventions. He nevertheless acknowledged that annual targets had been affected by illness among some judicial officers, inadequate numbers of State Attorneys and the time required to hear lengthy and complex public interest cases.

The quiet work behind better data

Away from the courtroom, another intervention is reshaping the Division's understanding of its workload. A nine-member Data Management Taskforce,



established by the Principal Judge and chaired by Justice Isah Sserunkuma, has been cleaning, verifying and digitising case files dating from before the introduction of the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS).

For a modern court, reliable data is more than an administrative requirement. It tells managers which cases are pending, how old they are, where bottlenecks exist and which interventions are producing results. Lady Justice Abodo commended the Division's commitment to data management, emphasising that accurate and consistent information is essential for performance monitoring, planning and informed decision-making.

The digital promise and the reality

ECCMIS sits at the centre of the Judiciary's transition towards end-to-end digital case management. For the Criminal Division, digitisation offers easier case tracking, faster access to records, improved accountability and more efficient management of cases from filing to conclusion.

But the engagement also revealed practical difficulties: frequent ECCMIS interruptions, unstable internet connectivity, occasional power outages and gaps in digitising older records. Some indictments and other critical documents are yet to be uploaded. The digital chain is further complicated where courts feeding cases into the Division have not yet been onboarded onto ECCMIS, with Kasangati Chief Magistrate's Court among those cited.

The Division therefore wants to strengthen end-to-end digital case management while investing in continuous ECCMIS and digital records management training. Digital transformation requires reliable



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (left), during a guided tour of the Criminal Division of the High Court by the Head of the Division, Justice David Matovu (centre), on January 27, 2026.

infrastructure, accurate information, trained users and consistent compliance.

When a case cannot move

Some obstacles to faster justice are strikingly practical. The Division serves eight judges but faces a shortage of Police Process Servers and transport facilities needed to serve court documents. There are also delays in transmitting committal files from lower courts and in processing those files through the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Add inadequate staffing, inconsistent data from some lower courts and gaps in training and compliance, and a case can encounter several potential delays before substantive hearing. These challenges reinforce an important principle: a court cannot operate efficiently in isolation. Police, prosecutors, prisons, advocates, witnesses, lower courts and the High Court are part of the same criminal justice chain.

Plea Bargaining becomes part of the routine

Among the Division's major responses is an intensified use of plea bargaining. Rather than treating it as an occasional intervention, the Division is moving towards institutionalising quarterly plea bargaining sessions for every judge.

For suitable cases, plea bargaining can reduce the time required to conclude proceedings while providing a structured process through which an accused person may plead guilty and the case is resolved subject to applicable legal safeguards. Timely resolution can reduce the period accused persons spend on remand, lower pressure on prisons, save judicial time and bring earlier closure to victims and other parties.

The meeting proposed developing and institutionalising Standard Operating Procedures for Plea Bargain Camps, together with sentencing guidelines to promote greater consistency.

An arsenal of case management tools

Plea bargaining is part of a broader strategy. The Criminal Division is strengthening the First-In-First-Out (FIFO) principle so that older cases receive priority rather than remaining buried beneath newer files. It is expanding Daily Hearings, conducting regular case screening and weeding exercises, and undertaking continuous in-house case census exercises.

Special backlog clearance sessions are also proposed. Another area receiving attention is witness and case attendance management. A trial cannot proceed



Criminal Division: The Year in Numbers

FY 2025/26 Indicator	Performance
Total caseload	3,976
Cases brought forward	2,620
New cases registered	1,356
Cases concluded	1,766
Disposal rate	44.42 percent
Clearance rate	130.24 percent
Cases pending	2,210
Backlog cases	581

efficiently if witnesses repeatedly fail to appear or an accused person is not produced in court.

Keeping an eye on people in custody

Efficiency in criminal justice has a human dimension. Participants recommended regular review of commitment warrants and custody status reports to minimise prolonged detention and ensure that persons in custody do not remain there unnecessarily because of administrative or procedural delays.

Managing criminal cases efficiently is therefore not merely a question of improving institutional statistics. It directly affects the rights and lives of people awaiting the determination of their cases.

Could Research Magistrates do more?

One of the more forward-looking proposals concerned the role of Research Magistrates attached to the Division. Participants proposed expanding their administrative responsibilities, within the applicable legal framework, to enable them to undertake certain procedural functions such as signing production warrants, issuing witness summons and processing bail extension

applications within their jurisdiction.

The thinking is practical: if appropriate procedural matters can be handled at the right administrative level, judges can devote more time to hearings, judgment writing and other substantive judicial work.

From a good year to sustainable performance

The Criminal Division's 130.24 percent clearance rate is an encouraging indicator of progress, but the Division's leadership did not treat it as a reason for complacency. There are still 2,210 pending cases, including 581 backlog cases, and the obstacles identified during the engagement require sustained attention.

The next phase is about making good performance sustainable: institutionalising interventions that work, strengthening accountability for data, ensuring older cases do not remain unattended, embracing technology from end to end, and building stronger relationships among the institutions whose work ultimately converges in the courtroom.

Lady Justice Abodo assured the judicial officers of her continued support and

urged them to maintain the teamwork that has contributed to the Division's progress.

The message was clear: faster criminal justice will not come from a single intervention. It will come from judges and staff working as a team; accurate data revealing where attention is needed; technology that works reliably; prosecutors, Police, prisons and courts coordinating effectively; and case management practices that ensure every file continues moving towards conclusion.

The Performance Toolkit

- Quarterly plea bargaining sessions for every judge
- Greater use of ECCMIS and end-to-end digital case management
- Daily Hearings
- Enforcement of the First-In-First-Out principle
- Regular case screening and weeding
- Continuous in-house case census exercises
- Special backlog clearance sessions
- Improved witness and case attendance management
- Regular review of commitment warrants and custody status
- Continuous ECCMIS and digital records management training
- Stronger data quality controls
- Closer coordination across the criminal justice chain

Participants

The performance engagement was attended by the Deputy Head of Division, Justice Emmanuel Baguma; Justice Gadenya Paul Wolimbwa; Justice Alex Ajiji Mackay; Justice Isah Sserunkuma; Lady Justice Rosette Comfort Kania; and Justice Andrew Khaukha. Also in attendance were HW Samuel Twakyire, Deputy Registrar; HW Esther Nakadama, Assistant Registrar; HW Edgar Nyakairu, Personal Assistant to the Principal Judge; and Research Magistrates attached to the Division. ●



Bail at the Anti-Corruption Division: What every court user should know

For an accused person, securing bail can mean the difference between waiting for trial in custody and returning home to family, work and everyday life while the case proceeds. Yet, for some applicants appearing before Uganda's Anti-Corruption Division (ACD), the bail process can come with requirements they may not have anticipated, particularly when it comes to the suitability and financial capacity of their sureties.

Why, for instance, might a surety be asked to produce a bank statement or evidence of property ownership? Why does the amount involved in an alleged corruption offence matter when the court considers bond terms? And why must a person facing a money laundering charge seek bail from the High Court and not a Magistrate's Court?

The answers lie in the specialised nature of the Anti-Corruption Division and the rules governing the cases it handles.

Bail begins with the presumption of innocence

At the heart of Uganda's bail framework is one of the most fundamental protections in criminal justice: the presumption of innocence.

Article 28(3) of the Constitution provides that every person charged with a criminal offence is presumed innocent until proved guilty or until that person pleads guilty. This principle is important because being charged with an offence does not amount to a conviction. Bail therefore provides a mechanism through which an accused person may remain out of custody while awaiting the hearing and determination of their case, subject to conditions imposed by the court.

But bail is not granted automatically.

The judicial officer considering an application must exercise discretion,



HW Talisuna Patrick Ngeleza

Assistant Registrar at the Anti-Corruption Division of the High Court.

balancing the rights of the accused person against the broader interests of justice. Among the central considerations is whether the accused person is likely to return to court and attend the proceedings until the case is concluded.

To promote consistency in the exercise of this discretion, the Chief Justice issued Bail Guidelines, which guide courts in handling bail applications. Guidelines 13 and 15 spell out key considerations judicial officers should take into account when deciding whether bail should be granted.

For applicants appearing before the Anti-Corruption Division, however, there is another layer to consider.

Why Bail at the ACD may look different

The Anti-Corruption Division handles specialised offences, many of which involve public funds, financial transactions or substantial sums of money.

As a result, bail applications at the Division are considered not only within the general constitutional and legal framework but also in accordance with the Anti-Corruption Division Case Management Rules.

These Rules introduce considerations tailored to the nature of cases handled by the Division.

One of the areas in which this becomes particularly important is the assessment of sureties. A surety is more than someone who simply accompanies an accused person to court and signs bail documents. By standing surety, that person gives an undertaking connected to the accused person's continued attendance before court.

The court must therefore be satisfied that the proposed surety can meaningfully fulfil that responsibility.

When the Court Asks: Can this surety meet the bond?

Rule 7 of the ACD Case Management Rules provides specific considerations relating to intending sureties.

The court is required to assess whether a surety is capable of ensuring that the accused person attends trial and whether the surety has the financial capacity to meet the conditions attached to the bond. This is particularly significant at the Anti-Corruption Division because many of the cases before it are financial in nature.



When determining an appropriate bond, the court may consider the amount of money involved in the alleged offence. This, in turn, makes it necessary to establish whether the proposed surety has sufficient financial means to undertake the bond.

That is why an intending surety may be required to provide supporting documentation such as bank statements or evidence of ownership of assets.

To someone unfamiliar with the process, these requirements may appear unusual or excessive. In practice, however, they enable the court to determine whether the bond imposed is meaningful and capable of serving its intended purpose.

A bond that bears no reasonable relationship to the means of a surety may provide little incentive to ensure that the accused person returns to court.

The assessment of a surety is therefore not intended merely to add another hurdle to the bail process. It is part of ensuring that the undertaking given to the court carries real responsibility.

Being a surety is a serious undertaking

For relatives, friends and colleagues who agree to stand surety, the lesson is simple: come prepared. An intending surety should understand the responsibility being assumed and should be ready to satisfy the court about their suitability.

Depending on the circumstances of the application, this may include demonstrating their relationship with or knowledge of the accused person, their ability to help ensure the accused attends court, and their financial capacity to meet the bond conditions.

Preparation can make a significant difference. Where the court requires

documents to establish a surety's financial standing, having them readily available may help avoid unnecessary delays in determining the application.

Money Laundering Cases

There is another important distinction prospective applicants need to understand.

Money laundering is an offence exclusively triable by the High Court. This has a direct bearing on bail.

Where a person is accused of money laundering and appears before a Magistrate's Court, the bail application in respect of that charge cannot be determined at that level. The accused person must instead apply directly to the High Court for bail.

Understanding the jurisdiction of the different courts is therefore essential. An applicant may otherwise approach a court that does not have the legal authority to determine the application, resulting in avoidable delays.

Preparation can make the process easier

The bail process at the Anti-Corruption Division does not operate outside Uganda's general constitutional framework. The presumption of innocence remains

fundamental, and the constitutional rights of an accused person remain central to the court's consideration.

What distinguishes the ACD is the additional framework created by its Case Management Rules to respond to the specialised nature of the cases before it. For prospective applicants, advocates and sureties, understanding these requirements before appearing in court can make the process easier to navigate.

Applicants should know the nature of the charges they face and the court with jurisdiction to entertain their bail application. Proposed sureties should understand that standing surety is a substantive responsibility and should be prepared to demonstrate their suitability and, where required, financial capacity.

Ultimately, bail involves a careful balancing exercise. The court must protect the constitutional rights of an accused person while ensuring that the administration of justice is not undermined and that the accused will return to court to face trial.

For those appearing before the Anti-Corruption Division, knowing what the court requires — and preparing accordingly — can take much of the uncertainty out of that process. ●

At a Glance: Before You Apply for Bail at the ACD

- **Know your rights:** An accused person remains presumed innocent until proved guilty or until they plead guilty.
- **Understand that bail is discretionary:** The court considers the circumstances of each application and the interests of justice.
- **Choose suitable sureties:** A surety must be capable of helping ensure that the accused person attends court.
- **Prepare proof of financial capacity:** Depending on the case and bond involved, sureties may be required to provide bank statements or evidence of assets.
- **Know the jurisdiction:** Bail relating to a money laundering charge must be sought before the High Court.
- **Prepare early:** Understanding the ACD-specific requirements and having the necessary documentation can help minimise avoidable delays.



Adoption: Strengthening safeguards to give vulnerable children a second chance

For a child who has lost parental care, been abandoned or whose biological family is unable to provide adequate care, adoption can mark the beginning of an entirely new chapter.



It can mean moving from uncertainty to stability, from deprivation to opportunity and, most importantly, finding a family willing and able to assume the responsibilities of parenthood.

In Uganda, however, adoption is deliberately not a simple process. Behind every adoption order lies a rigorous system of investigations, reports, background checks and judicial scrutiny designed around one overriding consideration, the protection and best interests of the child.

Justice John Eudes Keitirima, Head of the Family Division of the High Court, says the safeguards are necessary because while many prospective adoptive parents are motivated by compassion and a genuine desire to provide a home, the system must also guard against those who may approach adoption with improper intentions.

“We are aware that there are those who have bad intentions,” Justice Keitirima says, explaining that mechanisms have progressively been strengthened to ensure that an adoption order is only granted after the court is satisfied about the suitability and intentions of the prospective parents.



Justice John Eudes Keitirima, Head of the Family Division of the High Court,

Uganda’s experience with adoption over the years has, he says, provided important lessons that have helped the Judiciary and other responsible institutions strengthen the process.

A Rigorous journey before an adoption order

Long before prospective parents appear before a judge, considerable work has already taken place behind the scenes.

A probation and welfare officer undertakes investigations on the ground and prepares a report to help establish the circumstances surrounding the child and the suitability of the prospective adoptive parents. This background work is an essential safeguard intended to ensure that those seeking to adopt are genuine and capable of assuming parental responsibility.

Where the child’s biological parents are still alive, investigations must also establish that they have given informed consent and understand the implications

of relinquishing parental responsibility. The scrutiny does not end there.

A specialised panel under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development reviews adoption applications and submits an independent report to the court. By the time a matter reaches the High Court, therefore, substantial information has already been gathered.

Even then, the court undertakes its own independent scrutiny before determining whether an adoption order should be granted.

For international adoptions, additional safeguards apply. Prospective adoptive parents are required to provide Interpol clearance demonstrating that they have no criminal record. The court also considers official probation reports from their countries of origin regarding their character and financial ability to raise a child.

Justice Keitirima describes the strengthened safeguards as a “watertight process” intended to distinguish genuine applicants from those whose intentions or circumstances raise concerns.

The safeguards are not merely procedural. They have practical consequences. “Some applications have been rejected, especially where we feel due diligence has not been done on the adoptive parents,” he says.

Giving vulnerable children hope

Behind the court files, investigations and legal requirements are children whose



circumstances can be deeply difficult.

Some have been abandoned. Others have spent years in children's homes. In some instances, biological parents remain alive but simply lack the financial means to adequately feed, educate and provide other necessities for their children.

Justice Keitirima observes that poverty can expose children to severe deprivation, including malnutrition and hunger. In extreme circumstances, children may end up on the streets begging or become involved in hazardous child labour at very young ages.

It is against this background that adoption assumes significance beyond the courtroom.

When responsible and capable people open their homes to vulnerable children, adoption can bridge a profound socioeconomic divide. A child who might otherwise grow up without adequate care is offered stability, education, protection and the possibility of realising his or her potential.

For the adoptive parents, it is much more than providing financial assistance. Adoption means accepting the full responsibility of raising another human being, providing love, guidance, discipline, protection and belonging.

Why the process must be demanding

The Family Division handles a relatively modest number of adoption matters each year, generally not more than 200 cases, according to Justice Keitirima.

He attributes the number partly to the deliberately rigorous nature of the process.

Taking responsibility for a child who is

not biologically one's own demands exceptional commitment. The lengthy vetting process therefore serves not only as a legal safeguard but also, in practical terms, as a test of the applicant's determination.

A prospective parent who patiently goes through investigations, documentation, interviews and court scrutiny demonstrates something important: a willingness to persevere for the child.

In the court's view, that patience can be an indicator of the genuine desire and commitment required for the lifelong responsibility of parenthood.

More Ugandans Opening Their Homes

One particularly encouraging development has been the growing interest in formal adoption among Ugandans. Justice Keitirima notes that whereas adoption applications were previously dominated by foreign nationals, more Ugandans are increasingly stepping forward to adopt vulnerable children.

He views the trend as a welcome return to the traditional spirit of communities taking responsibility for children in need. For Ugandans who have the means and capacity to provide for another child, adoption offers an opportunity to ensure

that vulnerable children find homes within their own society and communities.

It is a shift that could have far-reaching consequences. Every child given a secure home receives not merely shelter for today, but an opportunity to develop their abilities and become a productive member of society tomorrow.

A second chance can change a life

Justice Keitirima emphasises that society may never know the full potential hidden within a vulnerable child.

A child who today needs a home may tomorrow become a leader, professional, innovator or changemaker. What may determine that future is simply whether someone was willing to provide an opportunity at the moment it was most needed.

That is the enduring promise of adoption.

It offers children stability, love and an environment in which they can grow, excel and contribute positively to society.

But that promise must be matched by protection.

For the Family Division, therefore, the rigorous investigations, reports and judicial scrutiny surrounding adoption are not obstacles placed in the way of prospective parents. They are safeguards designed to make certain that every decision serves the child whose future is at stake.

The Division remains open to individuals willing and able to take on the profound responsibility of adoption.

Because behind every application is much more than a court order. It is the possibility of a family, a future and a second chance for a child. ●



The project reflects a broader shift in thinking about access to justice: justice services do not necessarily have to remain tied exclusively to a permanent court building.



Judiciary, UNDP partner to reach islands and border communities

From mobile courts serving island communities to stronger dispute resolution along the Busia cross-border trade corridor, the STRIDE Uganda Project is set to explore new ways of bringing justice services closer to people who face geographical, economic and institutional barriers.



For a resident of an island community, accessing a court may mean more than simply travelling to the nearest town. It can involve crossing open water, meeting transport costs and spending considerable time away from work and family.

For a small-scale trader operating along a busy border corridor, a commercial dispute can similarly threaten a livelihood if there is no affordable and accessible mechanism through which it can be resolved quickly.

These are some of the access-to-justice challenges that the Judiciary and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are seeking to address through the Strengthening Trade, Rights, Inclusion, Justice and Dispute Resolution (STRIDE Uganda) Project.

The two institutions reaffirmed their partnership following a consultative meeting to build consensus on the project's priority areas, proposed interventions and implementation arrangements ahead of its rollout.

Chaired by the Judiciary Under Secretary, Ms Maureen Kasande, the engagement brought together officials from the Judiciary and UNDP to examine how the initiative can complement ongoing efforts to make justice more accessible, responsive and people-centred.



The Under Secretary, Ms Maureen Kasande (centre), joins UNDP and Judiciary officials for a group photograph following their meeting on July 29, 2026.



A partnership built around the justice user

For Ms Kasande, the partnership presents another opportunity to address one of the Judiciary's central priorities: ensuring that justice services reach the people who need them.

She expressed appreciation to UNDP for its continued partnership and support towards strengthening the administration of justice in Uganda.

She underscored the importance of improving service delivery and expanding access to justice through a people-centred approach, noting that strategic partnerships remain critical to achieving the Judiciary's mandate and delivering quality justice services to all Ugandans.

At the heart of that approach is a simple question: How can the justice system reach people whose circumstances make conventional court access difficult? STRIDE Uganda seeks to provide some practical answers.

One project, multiple pathways to justice

Providing an overview of the initiative, Ms Annet Mpabulungi Wakabi, UNDP Team Leader for Governance and Peace, explained that the one-year project would commence in August.

The Judiciary was identified as a key implementing partner under the UNDP-funded Global Programme on Rule of Law, Human Rights and Justice for Peace, Security and Development (GP5 Phase V).

Rather than focusing on a single justice intervention, STRIDE adopts an integrated approach combining community justice, responsible business



STRIDE seeks to strengthen this grassroots level of justice delivery through capacity building for Local Council Court members and mediators.

conduct, digital innovation, Alternative Dispute Resolution and mobile court services.

The aim is to address justice needs at different points from, disputes arising within communities to commercial disagreements involving people whose livelihoods depend on cross-border trade.

The initial focus will include the Busia cross-border trade corridor and Buvuma Island, two settings with distinct justice needs.

Justice across the water

One of the project's most striking proposed interventions is the expansion of mobile court services to island communities.

STRIDE envisages supporting the procurement and operationalisation of a dedicated boat for justice services, helping overcome one of the most obvious physical barriers confronting communities separated from conventional court infrastructure by water.

For island residents, geography can translate directly into limited access to services. Transport can be costly, unpredictable and time-consuming, making even a routine court appearance difficult.

Taking court services closer to such communities could therefore reduce the burden on litigants, witnesses and other court users.

But Buvuma is intended to be more than an isolated intervention.

According to Ms Mpabulungi, innovative justice delivery models piloted through the project are expected to provide lessons that can be replicated in other island districts and underserved communities across Uganda.

The approach effectively turns STRIDE into both a justice delivery programme and a testing ground for models that could eventually serve communities facing similar geographical barriers elsewhere.

Making trade and justice work together

The project's focus on the Busia cross-border trade corridor brings another dimension to access to justice.

Border communities are centres of economic activity where traders, transporters, businesses and consumers interact daily. With that activity inevitably come disputes.



The Under Secretary, Ms Maureen Kasande (right), during a meeting with UNDP and Judiciary officials at the Supreme Court Boardroom, Level 4, Kampala, on July 29, 2026.

For small-scale traders in particular, prolonged commercial disputes can have consequences far beyond the courtroom. Money tied up in a dispute may be working capital needed to sustain a household or keep a business operating.

STRIDE therefore seeks to strengthen commercial dispute resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, providing pathways through which appropriate disputes can be addressed efficiently.

This links justice delivery to economic participation. A justice system that can resolve commercial disagreements efficiently does more than settle cases, it helps create confidence in transactions and supports livelihoods.

Strengthening justice at community level

Not every dispute needs to begin in a formal courtroom. Local Council Courts are often among the closest justice institutions to communities and can play an important role in resolving disputes



The project reflects a broader shift in thinking about access to justice: justice services do not necessarily have to remain tied exclusively to a permanent court building.

before they escalate.

STRIDE seeks to strengthen this grassroots level of justice delivery through capacity building for Local Council Court members and mediators.

Training is expected to cover areas including case management, gender-responsive justice, commercial dispute resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution.

The project will also work to strengthen referral mechanisms between Local

Council Courts and the formal justice system.

Effective referral is important because community-level justice mechanisms need to know not only which matters they can appropriately handle, but also when a dispute should move to another institution within the justice system.

Building those connections can help create a more coherent justice pathway for court users.

ADR as part of the solution

Alternative Dispute Resolution is another important strand running through the project.

By strengthening mediation and other ADR mechanisms, STRIDE supports an approach in which appropriate disputes can be resolved without necessarily going through lengthy adversarial proceedings.

This can be particularly valuable for community and commercial disputes where parties may need to preserve



relationships after the disagreement has been resolved.

Strengthening the capacity of mediators and improving referral pathways can also enable disputes to be addressed at the most appropriate level, while leaving formal courts to concentrate resources on matters requiring judicial determination.

Digital innovation meets community justice

Technology is another component of STRIDE's integrated model. Digital innovation offers possibilities for overcoming some of the traditional barriers created by distance and limited physical court infrastructure.

Combined with mobile court services and stronger community justice mechanisms, technology can potentially help court users obtain information, interact with justice institutions and follow their matters without always undertaking costly journeys.

The project therefore reflects a broader shift in thinking about access to justice: justice services do not necessarily have to remain tied exclusively to a permanent court building.

The court can move. Information can move digitally. Appropriate disputes can be mediated. Community institutions can be strengthened. And cases can be referred to the right level of the justice system.

Together, these interventions can create multiple pathways through which people access justice.

Aligning partnerships with national priorities

The STRIDE Uganda Project is designed to complement rather than operate

STRIDE Uganda at a Glance

Project: Strengthening Trade, Rights, Inclusion, Justice and Dispute Resolution (STRIDE Uganda)

Duration: One year, commencing in August

Key implementing partner: Judiciary of Uganda

Initial focus: Busia cross-border trade corridor and Buvuma Island

Key areas of intervention

- Mobile court services for island and hard-to-reach communities;
- Procurement and operationalisation of a dedicated boat for justice services;
- Alternative Dispute Resolution and mediation;
- Commercial dispute resolution;
- Responsible business conduct;
- Digital innovation in justice delivery;
- Capacity building for Local Council Courts and mediators;
- Gender-responsive justice;
- Stronger referral mechanisms between Local Council Courts and the formal justice system; and
- Replication of successful models in other island districts and underserved communities.

separately from the Judiciary's broader strategic direction.

Its interventions align with the Judiciary's Strategic Plan, the Administration of Justice Programme and the National Development Plan IV.

This alignment is significant because development partnerships are most effective when they reinforce institutional and national priorities rather than create parallel programmes.

Ms Mpabulungi emphasised UNDP's commitment to supporting additional Judiciary priorities that are consistent with the objectives of STRIDE and the Judiciary's strategic direction.

For the Judiciary, the partnership consequently provides an opportunity to leverage development partner support while advancing interventions already central to its agenda — access to justice, ADR, technology, efficient dispute resolution and improved services for vulnerable and underserved communities.

From the courtroom to the community

The ambition behind STRIDE Uganda extends beyond resolving individual cases.

It is about rethinking where and how justice services are delivered. At community level, it may mean equipping Local Council Courts and mediators with stronger skills. Elsewhere, lessons from these interventions could inform new approaches to serving communities that remain distant from conventional court infrastructure.

For the Judiciary and UNDP, the challenge ahead will be translating the project's integrated design into practical improvements that court users can experience.

If successful, the lessons from STRIDE could demonstrate that overcoming barriers to justice does not always require communities to travel further in search of a courtroom. ●



Creating Sustainable Socio-Economic Impact in African Communities: Women Judges, Leadership and Purpose-Driven Careers

Across Africa, women judges are increasingly taking up visible and influential roles within justice systems. They sit in courtrooms, resolve disputes, interpret rights, supervise court processes, engage communities, mentor young professionals and contribute to public confidence in the rule of law. Their work is not limited to the formal act of adjudication. It also involves leadership, emotional labour, public service, ethical decision-making, institutional accountability and the constant negotiation of professional identity within justice systems.

For many women judges, the journey from legal training to judicial leadership is both empowering and demanding. It requires technical competence, integrity, resilience, emotional intelligence and a clear sense of purpose. At the same time, women judges often navigate gendered expectations that are rarely acknowledged as part of professional life. They may be expected to lead with excellence, remain available to family and community, manage motherhood and marriage, pursue further academic growth, mentor others, and still perform judicial duties with composure and authority. These expectations shape how women experience career progression, leadership, visibility, confidence and personal wellbeing.

Within and beyond professional work, the experiences of African women judges highlight an entry point to a broader conversation on women's leadership, purpose-driven careers and sustainable socio-economic impact in African communities.

Behind every judicial robe is a human being balancing professional responsibilities with family, community,



HW Roseline Nsenge

Chief Magistrate and also the General Secretary of the International Association of Women Judges- Uganda Chapter

and personal aspirations. In societies where women continue to shoulder disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, achieving this balance requires resilience, supportive institutions, and strong personal networks. Judicial excellence and personal wellbeing are not competing priorities—they are mutually reinforcing.

Many of the questions women judges confront are shared by women across sectors: how to lead with credibility, manage public and institutional expectations, balance career and family

responsibilities, overcome bias, sustain wellbeing, build networks, and translate professional training into lasting community impact.

The idea of the “academic judge” is especially important in this conversation. Many African women judges are pursuing or aspire to pursue postgraduate study, doctoral research, specialised training and scholarly writing. However, the transition from being a judicial officer to becoming an academic and intellectual contributor is not always straightforward. Judicial workloads, limited writing time, family responsibilities, lack of mentorship, uncertainty about publishing, can make this transition difficult. Yet academic engagement can strengthen judicial reasoning, improve justice delivery, inform law reform, support public education and create impact beyond individual cases.

Through advocacy initiatives among women judges and within communities, these contribute to access to justice, legal awareness, mentorship, institutional confidence and rights-based engagement. These experiences show that women judges can use their



Registrars pose for a group photo during a training on gender-responsive adjudication at the Court of Appeal Conference Hall on July 9, 2026. The training was organised by International Association of Women Judges-Uganda Chapter

platforms to create lasting impact not only through judgments, but also through community engagement, professional solidarity and mentorship.

A central concern of the discussion is the wellbeing and work-life integration. African women professionals often carry professional, family and social responsibilities at the same time. For women judges, these pressures may be heightened by the demands of judicial office, public scrutiny and institutional expectations.

For women in other sectors, similar pressures may appear through career uncertainty, unequal workloads, limited mentorship, family expectations, workplace bias or the constant pressure to prove competence. This necessitates the need to create space for honest reflection on how women manage time, mental health, energy, care responsibilities, ambition, self-doubt, leadership expectations and personal wellbeing.

A few questions may arise. How can African women judges and



Behind every judicial robe is a human being balancing professional responsibilities with family, community, and personal aspirations... Judicial excellence and personal wellbeing are not competing priorities—they are mutually reinforcing.

other women professionals build careers that are both professionally excellent and socially impactful? How can women use academic research, publishing and professional experience to strengthen institutions and community engagement? What forms of mentorship, peer support and professional networks are necessary to sustain women's leadership? How can women balance career progression, family responsibilities, academic development, advocacy and wellbeing

in realistic and sustainable ways? How can women use their professional platforms to support other women and girls within and beyond their sectors?

The expected outcome is a set of peer-generated strategies for supporting African women professionals in building purposeful, academically engaged and socially responsive careers. These may include mentorship circles, writing and publishing networks, peer accountability platforms, community-facing research outputs, leadership support spaces and stronger links between women's professional growth and institutional transformation.

Ultimately, this explores what it means for African women to move from career progression to purpose-driven impact. It positions women judges, and women professionals more broadly, as leaders, scholars, mentors, advocates and community actors whose careers can strengthen institutions, promote wellbeing and contribute to women's empowerment and sustainable socio-economic transformation across Sub-Saharan Africa. ●



Balancing justice with well-being

In court corridors, justice is not sustained by imposing courtrooms alone. It lives in the steady footsteps of judicial officers moving from chambers to the courtroom, in the bustle of processing files, in the vigilance of security officers safeguarding the court premises, and in the countless unseen acts of service that keep the justice system alive each day.

BY **EVAS KOBUSINGYE**
Client Service Officer,
The Judiciary



Every role, whether on the Bench delivering decisions or behind the scenes ensuring administrative continuity, carries a sacred responsibility. Together, these collective efforts form the heartbeat of justice in Uganda. Yet the noble pursuit of *Justice for All* often carries a hidden burden. Long hours, emotionally demanding cases, public scrutiny, and rising performance expectations can gradually take their toll. In striving to keep the scales of justice balanced for the nation, many officers quietly neglect the balance of their own lives. Sustainable justice, however, begins with sustainable well-being.

Governing the inner world

True wellness is not the absence of pressure, it is the capacity to manage pressure with wisdom, resilience, and grace. Just as courts exercise jurisdiction over disputes, each officer must learn to exercise healthy “personal jurisdiction” over their own mental and emotional space. Intentional self-care is not indulgence; it is professional responsibility. A calm mind sharpens judgment, improves interpersonal engagement, and strengthens ethical clarity. When inner equilibrium is maintained, service becomes not only efficient but deeply fulfilling.

The power of the protocol break

In courtrooms and offices, protocol guides every action. Ironically, our own bodies and

minds often operate without structured care. Introducing a personal protocol for rest can transform productivity and health. After every two hours of focused work; whether drafting rulings, compiling records, handling correspondence, or reconciling accounts, a simple five-minute reset restores balance. Standing, stretching, deep breathing, and briefly shifting away from screens relieves physical strain and mental fatigue. These micro-pauses, though small, protect long-term vitality.

Emotional decorum beyond the courtroom

The Judiciary is daily exposed to conflict, grief, trauma, and human complexity. Without conscious emotional management, these experiences can silently accumulate. Practicing what may be termed *emotional archiving* helps preserve inner peace. At the close of the workday, officers can intentionally visualise placing the day’s tensions into a mental cabinet that remains at the office. Crossing the court gates then becomes a symbolic transition; from public duty to private renewal. This separation safeguards family life, personal relationships, and emotional health.

Health as the Judiciary’s primary infrastructure

While buildings, technology, and vehicles support justice delivery, the most critical infrastructure remains human health. A sharp mind requires a strong and nourished body. Prioritising wholesome, nutrient-rich foods over fast convenience options sustains energy and concentration. Uganda’s abundant local greens, fruits, and organic produce provide natural nourishment that supports long working

hours and demanding schedules. Physical vitality remains a silent but decisive contributor to performance excellence.

The walk of peace

Movement remains one of the simplest yet most powerful forms of therapy. Whether walking through court gardens, neighbourhood roads, or open green spaces, regular movement calms the nervous system, refreshes perspective, and restores emotional balance. Uganda’s natural beauty offers daily invitations to reconnect with peace and presence.

Wellness as a collective responsibility

Well-being flourishes in community. Within the Judiciary family, mutual care strengthens institutional morale and professional harmony. Judicial Officers can uplift support teams through consistent appreciation and respectful engagement. Non-Judicial Officers contribute significantly by maintaining calm, orderly, and efficient working environments that allow judicial work to flourish. Simple courtesies, empathy, and collaboration quietly sustain institutional health. True justice begins with peaceful hearts. When officers thrive, service transcends routine duty and becomes enduring legacy.

A Personal reflection

Every officer is invited to reflect: *Which small act of self-care can I practice daily to ease the pressures of my responsibilities?* Often, it is the smallest habits; a short walk, mindful breathing, a healthier meal choice, a moment of gratitude; that produce the greatest transformation in clarity, energy, and peace of mind. ●



Remembering the First Ugandan Chief Justice **Hon. Benedicto Kiwanuka**



The Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture Organising Committee, chaired by the Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Moses Kazibwe Kawumi.



Benedicto Kiwanuka: The Enduring Symbol of Judicial Courage

As the Judiciary holds the 9th Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture, Uganda's first African Chief Justice remains a powerful symbol of judicial independence, constitutionalism and courage in defence of the rule of law.

On September 21, 1972, Chief Justice Benedicto Kagimu Kiwanuka was seized from his chambers at the High Court in Kampala by agents of President Idi Amin's regime. He was never seen again.

More than five decades later, his disappearance remains one of the darkest moments in Uganda's judicial history. Yet, from that tragedy has emerged an enduring legacy that continues to shape national conversations about judicial independence, constitutionalism, human rights and the rule of law.

This year, the Judiciary will hold the **Ninth Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture** under the theme, *"Justice for All: Carrying Forward Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka's Vision."*

The annual lecture honours Chief Justice's Kiwanuka's life, sacrifice and contribution to Uganda while providing a national platform for reflection on the state of constitutionalism, judicial independence and the administration of justice.

Kiwanuka is remembered not simply as a former Chief Justice, political leader or public servant, but as a man who paid the ultimate price for standing by the law.

A life devoted to public service

Benedicto Kiwanuka occupies a unique place in Uganda's political and judicial history. He was chief minister in Uganda's self government prior to Independence, and later became the first Ugandan Chief Justice.

His public career traversed both the political and judicial spheres at a time when Uganda was struggling to define its identity, institutions and constitutional order following independence.

However, it was his courage on the Bench that ultimately defined his legacy.

Kiwanuka served during one of Uganda's most turbulent periods, when the independence of state institutions was under severe threat. He became known for insisting that the exercise of public power must remain subject to the law and that courts must be allowed to perform their constitutional duties without intimidation.

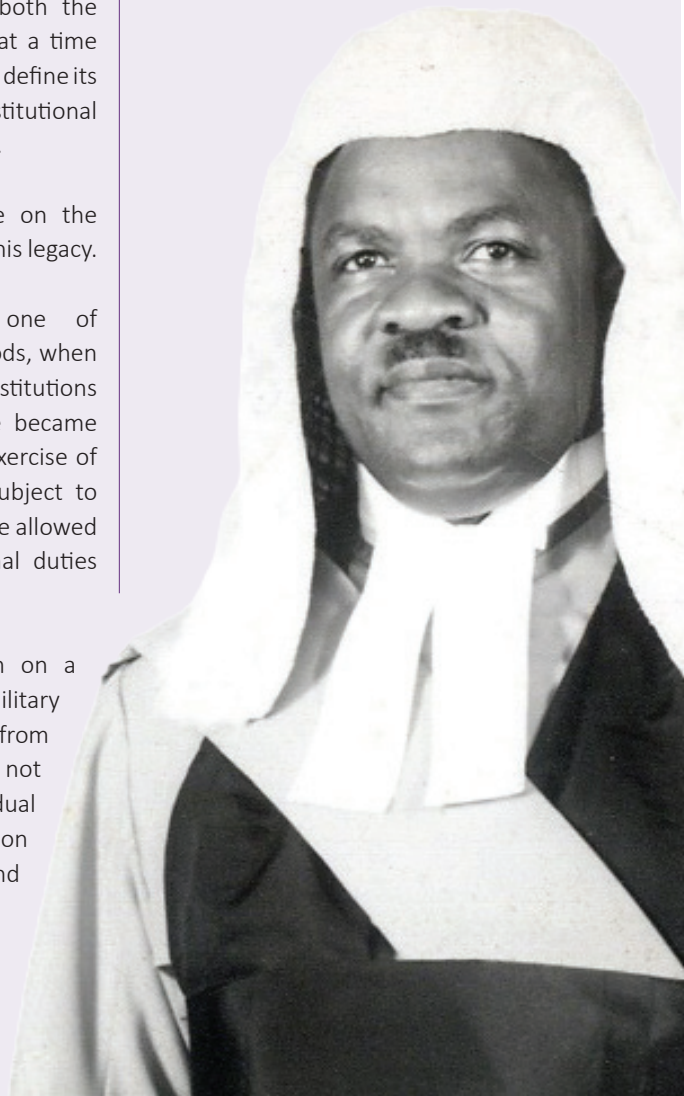
His commitment placed him on a collision course with the military government. His abduction from the High Court represented not only an attack on an individual judge, but also an assault on judicial independence and constitutional government.

A sacrifice that still speaks

Chief Justice Kiwanuka's disappearance has come to symbolise the grave consequences that may follow when the rule of law is abandoned and courts are subjected to political intimidation.

Chief Justice emeritus Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo described Kiwanuka's martyrdom as a consequence of his determination to assert judicial independence in the face of a Chief Executive who had no regard for the rule of law.

According to Justice Owiny - Dollo, commemorating Kiwanuka requires judicial officers and citizens alike to





US President John F. Kennedy meets Uganda Chief Minister Benedicto Kiwanuka, October 17, 1971. Courtesy Photo.

reflect upon his life and ask what they have done, and what more they can do for the people of Uganda.

“We are called upon to mirror the life of the indomitable Benedicto Kiwanuka and ask ourselves what we have so far done, and what else we can do, for our people,” Justice Owiny - Dollo said during one of the previous memorial lectures.

Justice Kiwanuka’s story therefore carries a challenge that extends beyond the Judiciary. It calls upon all arms of government, legal practitioners, political leaders and citizens to defend the constitutional order and resist the misuse of public power.

Judicial independence as a public safeguard

Successive Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lectures have become important platforms for examining the meaning and practical requirements of judicial independence.

The message emerging from the lectures is that judicial independence is not a privilege enjoyed by judicial officers. It is a safeguard for every person who seeks justice before the courts.

An independent Judiciary gives citizens confidence that their disputes will be determined according to the law and evidence, without fear, favour, political pressure or improper influence.

Former Deputy Chief Justice Richard Buteera has emphasised that the rule of law and respect for human rights cannot be separated from the independence of

the Judiciary.

“We require strong and independent justice institutions to foster and enforce the law,” Justice Buteera said, noting that an independent Judiciary must remain accountable to the Constitution and committed to the fair and equal treatment of all people.

He observed that judicial officers contribute to national transformation by ensuring that citizens enjoy their rights as they conduct their affairs within the law.

The celebration of Kiwanuka’s life, Justice Buteera said, calls upon every judicial officer to reflect on what they have done—and what more they can do—to build a stronger and more independent Judiciary capable of delivering justice fairly, speedily and impartially.

The foundations of judicial independence

Judicial independence is not secured by constitutional declarations alone. It depends on strong institutions, professional integrity, adequate resources, security of tenure and respect for court decisions.

Justice Owiny - Dollo identified several foundations upon which judicial independence rests. These include an enabling legal system, the exclusive exercise of judicial authority by the courts, proper interpretation and application of the law, and the obligation of the State to provide sufficient resources for the Judiciary to function effectively.

Judicial independence also requires the appointment of suitable and qualified persons, protection of judicial officers’ security of tenure and respect for court



decisions regardless of who is affected by them.

Financial and administrative autonomy are equally critical. The enactment of the Administration of the Judiciary Act, 2020 marked a significant step towards strengthening the institutional independence of Uganda's Judiciary.

Justice Owiny-Dollo has acknowledged the progress made under the Act while stressing the Judiciary's desire for greater involvement in the recruitment, promotion and discipline of its staff.

Ultimately, however, judicial independence must be experienced by ordinary citizens. It should translate into accessible courts, impartial judicial officers, fair processes and decisions delivered without undue delay.

Lessons from across Africa

Benedicto Kiwanuka's legacy has attracted reflection from distinguished jurists across Africa, affirming the continental significance of his sacrifice.

Justice Emmanuel Nii Ashie of the Supreme Court of Ghana emphasised that safeguarding judicial independence requires appointments and promotions to be based on merit.

Once appointed, judicial officers must enjoy security of tenure and should not be removed unless they violate their oath or the law. Justice Ashie also pointed to financial autonomy and freedom from external influence as essential pillars of an independent Judiciary.

"Independence of the Judiciary requires that it is separate from the Executive and the Legislature, and that it is not influenced by any person in the



Archbishop Joseph Nakabaale Kiwanuka (front 2nd L) and Benedicto Kiwanuka. Courtesy Photo.

performance of its judicial functions," he said.

This independence does not mean that the Judiciary cannot engage with other institutions. Courts must work with justice-sector actors, government institutions and communities while maintaining their decisional independence.

Kenya's former Chief Justice Dr Willy Mutunga similarly described Kiwanuka as a resilient judicial officer who refused to surrender his conscience despite pressure from Idi Amin's regime.

He warned that politics and the rule of law cannot be divorced and urged African judiciaries not to succumb to pressure from political regimes or participate in the mismanagement of justice.

"Judicial courage means defiance of all

these pressures," Justice Mutunga said.

His message places Kiwanuka's story within the wider African struggle to build justice institutions capable of safeguarding citizens' rights, even during periods of political instability.

Holding judicial office in trust

Former Chief Justice Bart Katureebe described Kiwanuka's legacy as worthy of celebration because of his boldness and steadfast commitment to judicial independence and the rule of law.

"As judicial officers, we hold our offices in trust for the people of Uganda and we are accountable to the people through the Constitution," Justice Katureebe said.

Under Article 128 of the Constitution, courts are required to exercise judicial power independently and must not be



subjected to the control or direction of any person or authority.

This principle protects court users. It ensures that judicial decisions are founded on the law and evidence rather than personal interests, political demands or external pressure.

Justice Katureebe also underscored the enduring principle that justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done. Public confidence therefore depends on both the actual independence of judicial officers and the visible fairness and impartiality of court processes.

A principled national leader

Justice Kiwanuka's contribution extended beyond the courtroom. He is also remembered for advocating national unity and resisting divisive politics.

President Yoweri Museveni has described him as a truthful and principled leader who stood firmly against tribal chauvinism.

The President has hailed Kiwanuka for embracing a national outlook at a time when Uganda's politics was deeply affected by ethnic, religious and regional divisions.

"I worked with him in the Democratic Party. Although DP still had its sectarian side, being mainly a Catholic party, at least on national unity, they took a correct position, and we should salute him for that," President Museveni said during one of the commemorations.

The President invoked the proverb "*Agalya awamu ge galuma ennyama*"—teeth that are together are better able to chew meat—to emphasise unity and

collective national purpose.

This dimension of Kiwanuka's legacy remains relevant to contemporary Uganda. It demonstrates that constitutional leadership requires more than holding public office; it demands integrity, truthfulness and the willingness to place the national interest above narrow political considerations.

From remembrance to responsibility

The Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture is both a celebration and an occasion for institutional reflection.

It celebrates the life of an accomplished lawyer, political leader and jurist. It honours his steadfast defence of judicial independence. It also acknowledges the pain of a family and nation that never recovered his remains or received a complete account of what happened to him.

Yet remembrance cannot end with speeches and tributes. Kiwanuka's legacy calls for a renewed commitment to courts that serve every person fairly, protect constitutional rights and remain firm in the face of pressure.

For judicial officers, this means deciding



Benedicto Kiwanuka hoists the Democratic Party's flag, likely after the party's electoral victories in 1961. Source: Benedicto Kiwanuka Private Papers, Kampala. Courtesy Photo.

cases independently, impartially and courageously. For the State, it means respecting court decisions, safeguarding security of tenure and providing the Judiciary with sufficient financial, human and administrative resources.

For lawyers and other administration of justice actors, it means protecting the integrity of legal processes and standing against interference in the administration of justice.

For citizens, it means respecting the law while remaining vigilant against the abuse of public power.

Justice for all

The theme of the Ninth Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture, "*Justice for All: Carrying Forward Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka's Vision*" captures the continuing relevance of his life and sacrifice.

Justice for all means courts that are physically, financially and procedurally accessible. It requires equal treatment regardless of social standing, political affiliation, gender, ethnicity, religion or economic status.

It demands timely decisions, accountable institutions and laws that protect rather than oppress.

More than half a century after he was taken from his chambers, Benedicto Kiwanuka remains a powerful reminder that judicial independence must never be taken for granted.

His legacy lives wherever a judicial officer decides a case without fear or favour; wherever a court protects the rights of the vulnerable; and wherever public power is held accountable to the Constitution. ●



Carrying forward Benedicto Kiwanuka's legacy of justice for the common person

As a family, we remain profoundly grateful to the Government of Uganda, the Judiciary and all those who have continued to honour and preserve the memory and legacy of the late Chief Justice Benedicto Kagimu Mugumba Kiwanuka.

By Ambassador Maurice Kagimu Kiwanuka

We particularly acknowledge Chief Justice Emeritus Bart Katureebe, under whose leadership the Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture was initiated; Chief Justice Emeritus Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny-Dollo; the current Chief Justice, Justice Dr Flavian Zeija; and their respective teams, past and present.

Through this annual commemoration, the Judiciary has ensured that the contribution of this great son of Africa, Uganda's first Prime Minister and first Ugandan Chief Justice, continues to occupy its rightful place in our national memory.

May the Almighty continue to bless all those who have sustained this noble undertaking and grant the late Hon. Benedicto Kiwanuka eternal rest.

As we commemorate him, however, we should go beyond

remembering the offices he occupied and reflect on the principles which he stood for. At the centre of Kiwanuka's public life was an abiding concern for justice, particularly justice for the ordinary person.

Fighting for the common person

Kiwanuka consistently championed the interests of ordinary Ugandans. One example that remains vivid in our family history relates to coffee farmers during his brief tenure as Chief Minister in 1961.

At the time, African farmers were receiving very low prices for their coffee while intermediaries benefited considerably from the trade. This had generated considerable dissatisfaction among African farmers, who wanted greater freedom to market their produce and receive a fair return for their labour.

When Kiwanuka came to power, he sought to address this imbalance. Coffee was generating substantial revenue, yet the farmers who produced it received very little in return. Under his administration, the price paid to farmers increased significantly. For many families, the improvement was transformative. Farmers were able to improve their homes, buy motorcycles and vehicles, educate their children and generally enjoy a better standard of living.



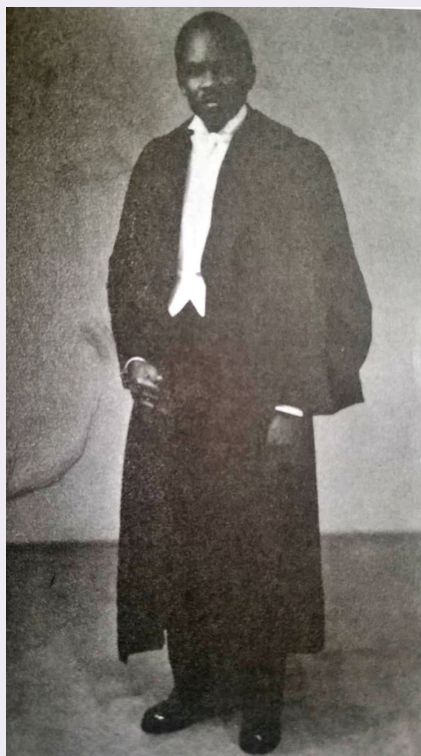
The political controversies surrounding Kiwanuka's relationship with the Mengo establishment and the events that followed are matters deserving fuller treatment elsewhere. What is important for the purposes of this reflection is the principle underlying his intervention: economic justice mattered to him because the welfare of the ordinary Ugandan mattered.

That concern for the common person provides a useful lens through which we can examine some of the justice questions confronting Uganda today.

Recognising the unpaid contribution of spouses

One area in which our courts have progressively sought to achieve substantive justice is matrimonial property.

Uganda has debated comprehensive reforms to its marriage laws for



1956: Benedicto Kiwanuka on his graduation day from Law School in the United Kingdom. Courtesy Photo.

many years, with proposals attracting considerable discussion around culture, religion, property rights and polygamy. In the meantime, courts have continued to confront the practical realities of families when marriages break down.

An important question is how we value the contribution of a spouse who may not have directly contributed money towards the acquisition of family property but spent years raising children, maintaining the home and supporting the family.

The principle that contribution should not be understood exclusively in financial terms has long been recognised in matrimonial jurisprudence. Domestic work, childcare and other forms of non-monetary support can make an important contribution to the acquisition and preservation of family property.

This principle is particularly important in our African context.

A mother may carry and raise several children, endure sleepless nights caring for them, attend to their upbringing and education, maintain the household and provide the support that enables her spouse to pursue income-generating activities. It would be unjust to treat all that labour as having no value simply because she did not directly provide the money used to purchase a particular property.

There is a simple story that illustrates the point. A husband once complained that his wife did nothing because he was the one who paid the household bills. The following day, he returned home to find the children hungry and unattended, the house in disorder and no food prepared. His wife was peacefully reading a novel.



Benedicto Kiwanuka at a political rally in the 1960s. Courtesy Photo.



When he demanded to know what had happened, she reminded him that, according to him, she did “nothing.”

He quickly understood the point.

Our courts have increasingly recognised that a spouse’s contribution to matrimonial property may be direct and monetary or indirect through domestic and other services. The Supreme Court decision in *Julius Rwabinumi v Hope Bahimbisomwe* is among the authorities that have contributed to Uganda’s jurisprudence on matrimonial property and spousal contribution.

Such developments represent an important pursuit of substantive justice, justice that looks beyond money and recognises the realities of family life.

The challenge of prolonged remand

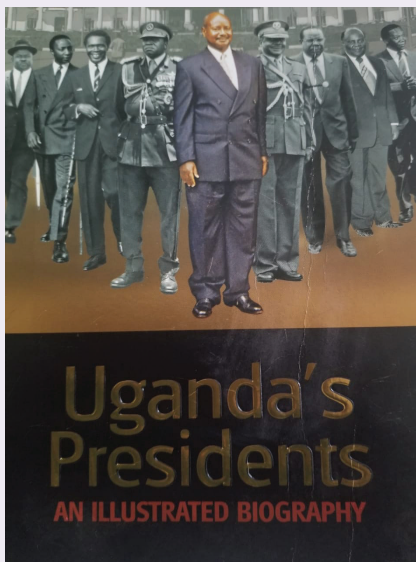
Another matter that deserves serious reflection is prolonged detention on remand and congestion in prisons.

This subject is personal to me. I was once committed to civil prison following proceedings at Masaka and subsequently successfully appealed. I spent three months in detention. That experience exposed me to prison conditions and left me deeply concerned about people who spend extraordinarily long periods in custody while awaiting the conclusion of their cases.

I have encountered accounts of prisoners said to have spent several years on remand. Whatever the circumstances of individual cases, prolonged remand raises fundamental questions about access to justice, the right to a fair and speedy hearing and the human consequences of delay.



1961: Chief Minister Benedicto Kiwanuka inspecting guard of honour before his swearing-in as Chief Minister. Courtesy Photo.



Book cover of Uganda’s Presidents: An Illustrated Biography, highlighting key leaders throughout the nation’s political history. Courtesy Photo.

I therefore commend initiatives undertaken by the Judiciary to accelerate the disposal of criminal cases, including plea bargaining.

Such interventions demonstrate

what determined case-management initiatives can achieve.

The question is how these efforts can be strengthened and sustained so that people do not remain in custody unnecessarily because their cases have not progressed.

Uganda should continue exploring practical measures to reduce case backlog and prison congestion while safeguarding the rights of accused persons, victims and the wider public. Where appropriate and legally feasible, consideration could also be given to drawing upon the experience of retired judicial officers to support carefully designed backlog-reduction initiatives.

There is also a need to strengthen legal assistance for indigent accused persons. Allegations occasionally arise of vulnerable people being wrongfully accused or remaining unable to effectively defend themselves because



they cannot afford legal representation. Such claims must, of course, be investigated and determined through proper legal processes rather than presumed to be true.

Nevertheless, they underscore the importance of legal aid, timely investigations, effective case management and mechanisms through which possible miscarriages of justice can be appropriately reviewed.

Justice must protect both society and the individual.

Justice Rooted in Our Social Realities

I conclude with another question that has occupied my mind: to what extent should our courts take account of African social and cultural realities when dispensing justice?

I was particularly struck by a previous Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture in which Dr Busingye Kabumba discussed *Uganda Electricity Board v G.W. Musoke*, a case involving a claim arising from the electrocution of a child.

The case raises a broader question concerning claims for loss of dependency and the evidence required to establish an expectation that a child would have supported his or her parents in later life.

In many African societies, parents make enormous sacrifices to educate their children with an expectation, not merely economic, but deeply embedded in family and community relationships, that those children will support them in old age.

How, then, does a parent prove the future financial support that a child who has died might have provided?

The law rightly requires evidence and must guard against decisions founded merely on assumption. Yet our jurisprudence must also remain alive to the society within which the law operates.

This raises an enduring question for Uganda's justice system: how do we maintain the certainty and safeguards of established legal principles while ensuring that justice reflects our lived realities, traditions and social relationships?

The development of an indigenous jurisprudence does not require abandoning established legal principles. Rather, it calls for thoughtful engagement between those principles, our Constitution, our laws and the social realities of the people whom the justice system exists to serve.

That, I believe, would be consistent with the spirit of Benedicto Kiwanuka.



1971: Benedicto Kiwanuka barefoot as he awaits release from Luzira Prison.
Courtesy Photo.

His legacy was not simply about occupying high office. It was about courage, fairness, service and an enduring commitment to the common person.

As we mark the 9th Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture, we honour him best not merely by remembering his name, but by continuing to ask the difficult questions he would have asked: Does our justice system protect the vulnerable? Does it respond to the realities of ordinary people? Does it deliver justice fairly, effectively and without unnecessary delay?

Those questions remain as relevant today as they were during his lifetime.

For God, my country and the late Hon. Benedicto Kiwanuka. ●

Amb. Maurice Kagimu Kiwanuka, Son and heir of the late Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka



Benedicto Kiwanuka is carried aloft upon being released from Luzira prison in 1971 after Amin overthrew Obote.
Courtesy Photo.



Was the price Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka paid worth it?

“Was it all worth it? Was justice worth the bother if it was going to cost us everything?” That was a question I heard my mother repeat so often after her husband, my father, the late Benedicto Mugumba Kiwanuka, was abducted from the chambers at the High Court.

By Regina Kiwanuka

How in the name of the universe was that even possible? She would always wonder. How could the Chief Justice of a country be taken from his own chambers? “Did your father make the right choice?” she would ask. Her instincts had been right from the beginning, she would continue. “I never wanted my husband to join that government. But as fate would have it...” September 21 will always remain Benedicto Kiwanuka Day in Uganda.

As the Judiciary gathers each year to honour his memory, I think of him not only as a citizen of this nation, but as a daughter remembering her father, a man whose life became inseparable from the cause of justice.

To the people of Uganda, he is remembered as Uganda’s first Prime Minister and later its first Ugandan Chief Justice, a towering figure in our nation’s journey towards independence and the rule of law. To me, however, he was simply Dad. Taata, as we used to call him.

I remember him as a man of tremendous strength and deep conviction. He believed that justice was not a privilege for the few, but a right for all. Even in the smallest moments at home, his life reflected discipline, integrity and an unwavering sense of fairness. He often reminded us that the truth must be spoken, not merely when it is easy, but especially when it is difficult.



Benedicto Kiwanuka during his swearing-in as Prime Minister in 1961. Courtesy Photo.

Father rose from very humble and unusual beginnings. Nothing about the circumstances into which he was born suggested the extraordinary path his life would eventually take. Yet he worked tirelessly to improve himself. He understood that education was the key to opening doors that circumstances had closed, and eventually he dedicated his life to helping build a nation founded upon law and equality.

He believed in a Uganda where one’s tribe, religion or status would never determine the justice one received.

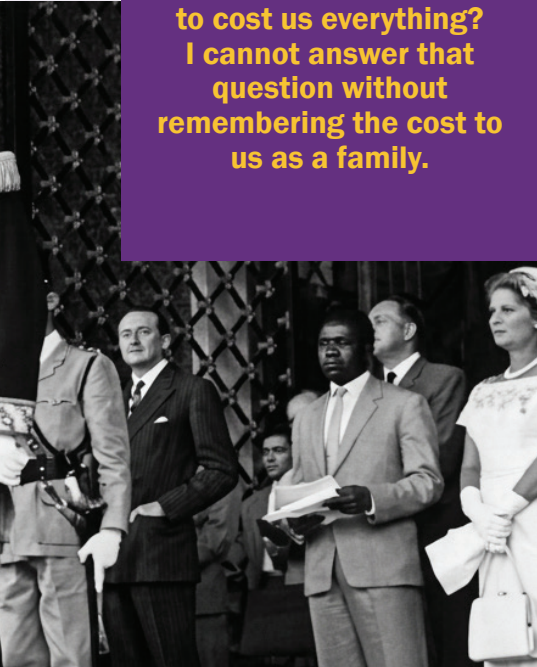
Whenever I hear discussions about

discrimination and injustice, particularly in foreign countries where some of us have travelled or lived, I think of Father. Some of these countries were themselves part of our colonial history, yet they still struggle with questions of equality and the acceptance of foreigners. Father had recognised similar dangers long ago and fought against discrimination and injustice in his own country, among his own fellow citizens.

As Chief Justice, he refused to accept anything less than an independent Judiciary. He knew that without fearless and impartial courts, there could be no true freedom for the people of Uganda.



Mother's question remains with me: Was it all worth it? Was justice worth the bother if it was going to cost us everything? I cannot answer that question without remembering the cost to us as a family.



What I will never fully fathom is that Father had everything to lose. He loved us. He loved Mother with all his heart, and we could see and feel his love for his family.

He worked tirelessly, seemingly without a break, for all of us. And by all of us, I also mean the entire nation of Uganda. Yet he believed that justice was not merely a profession. It was a calling, and sometimes that calling could demand the ultimate sacrifice.

Mother understood the danger better than any of us. She worried constantly and would often ask Father, "What will ever happen to us if you were to leave us?"

His response was always, "My dear, whatever will be, will be." Imagine living with such a husband. Mother must have died a thousand deaths living beside Father. She knew the danger surrounding him, but she also knew the man she had married. His principles were part of him. It was next to impossible to separate Benedicto Kiwanuka the husband and father from Benedicto Kiwanuka the lawyer, politician and Chief Justice who believed so deeply in the rule of law.

Eventually, Mother's greatest fear became reality. Yet the principles for which Father stood did not disappear with him. His courage, integrity, boldness and service remain part of the legacy upon which our justice system must continue to build.

I also remember my late siblings; Flugencio Musoke Kiwanuka, Emmanuel Mugumba Kiwanuka, Imelda Sylvia Kiwanuka, Benedicto Musajakaawa Kiwanuka, Stephen Mukasa Kiwanuka and Peter Benedicto Kiwanuka, who are no longer with us to appreciate their beloved father.

On their behalf, I would like to express my gratitude to the Judiciary for continuing to commemorate Father's legacy each year.

If my father were still here today, he would ask for commitment to fairness, to truth, to an independent Judiciary, and to the protection of every citizen under the rule of law.

As his daughter, I carry both pride and responsibility: pride in the legacy he left behind, and responsibility to ensure that it is not forgotten.

I also carry one particular hope. Perhaps one day the Judiciary will see it fit to

take this commemoration to Benedicto Kiwanuka's village of Kisaabwa in Bukomansimbi, so that the sons and daughters of the village and district that produced such a rare gem can also experience the significance of the legacy that began on their own soil.

It would mean a lot for the children of Kisaabwa to know that a boy who came from their village, rose to become the first Prime Minister of Uganda and later the country's first Chief Justice. His story belongs not only in courtrooms and history books, but also in the place where his journey began.

May his life continue to inspire all who serve in the Judiciary to stand firm, speak boldly and uphold justice without fear or favour.

And still, Mother's question remains with me: Was it all worth it? Was justice worth the bother if it was going to cost us everything? I cannot answer that question without remembering the cost to us as a family.

We lost a husband. We lost a father. Our lives were never the same again. But perhaps Father had already answered the question through the way he chose to live.

He believed that there are moments when justice demands courage, even when courage carries a terrible price. That is the Benedicto Kiwanuka Uganda remembers. And that is the man I remember simply as Taata.

Thank you, dear Judiciary, for keeping his memory alive. Words may never be enough, but they are all we have. ●

Regina Kiwanuka is a daughter of the late Chief Justice Benedicto Mugumba Kiwanuka



To my father, the Late Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka, who went too soon

Being one of the older children of the late Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka, I was fortunate to share many moments with him, something that my younger siblings did not have.

By Josephine Kiwanuka

To the nation, our father was a statesman—the first Prime Minister of Uganda and later Chief Justice. But to us, he was simply Father.

Behind the serious public figure was a warm and humorous man. He loved to crack jokes at the dinner table, often sending the whole family into bouts

of laughter. Those are some of the memories of him that I treasure most.

Although his public responsibilities meant that he could not spend as much time with the family as we would have liked, he made an effort to see us at least twice a day—at lunch and again at dinner. Those meals became precious family moments. We miss him terribly!

He had entered a new chapter of his life when he was brutally abducted and taken away from us. Our mother never truly got over his disappearance. She spoke about him often, and through her words, his presence remained very much a part of our lives.

For us as a family, his disappearance changed everything. In many ways, it felt



This photograph speaks volumes about the family of the late Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka. Although he is not pictured here, his presence is very much part of the story. In early 1955, his wife, our dear Mother, Maxencia Zalwango Kiwanuka, is seen holding their youngest child at the time, Musajakaawa.

Seated beside Mother are their first five children. Josephine, Imelda, Emmanuel, and Musoke. She had just returned from London, while our father remained there completing his studies for the Bar. In the background stands a simple mud house, a quiet reminder of where their journey began. There was no grand residence, no title, and no indication of the extraordinary path that lay ahead.

From these humble beginnings, Benedicto Kiwanuka would rise to become Uganda's first Prime Minister and later Chief Justice of Uganda. Looking at this photograph today, one sees more than a young mother surrounded by her children. One sees the beginning of a family story that would become inseparable from the history of Uganda.

From the mud house to the office of the Chief Justice.



In this photograph, one can see the family's transition; from the humble mud house of earlier years to a better-constructed home in Kampala, Uganda's capital.

Although our father, the late Benedicto Kiwanuka, was not in the photograph, by 1961 his family had grown to seven children, with the eighth on the way. It was a period of tremendous change, not only for our family but also for Uganda.

Standing from left to right are Josephine Kiwanuka, Mother Maxencia Zalwango, Imelda, and Musoke. Seated from left to right are Regina, Musajakaawa, Stephen, and Emmanuel.

This photograph was taken in 1961, shortly before Father's political rise led him to become Uganda's first Prime Minister. Soon afterward, our family left this home and moved to the official residence in Entebbe.

Looking at the house behind them, one can see more than a family photograph. It captures a moment of transition, from humble beginnings to public life, and from an ordinary family home to a life at the very heart of Uganda's history.

like the end of the family we had known.

We had to continue living. We had to grow up and move forward. But deep inside, there was an emptiness that could never be filled. We were a family without our father.

I remember something he once said:

"By the time I am 70 years old, it will be the Josephines who will be handling matters." He was referring to me.

I have never forgotten those words. They have remained with me throughout

my life because they reveal something deeply painful when I look back on them today: our father expected to grow old. He imagined himself reaching 70 and watching his children mature, take responsibility, and carry on the work of the family.

He had every intention of living a long life. But fate had other plans.

His life was taken from us far too soon, leaving behind a wife, children, a family, and a country that still had so much to receive from him.



Late Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka expected to grow old. He imagined himself reaching 70 and watching his children mature, take responsibility, and carry on the work of the family.

Today, on behalf of my younger siblings and our family, I am honoured to share some of the photographs that were preserved in our father's library. I hope that through these photographs, members of the Judiciary and others gathered for this commemoration may see another side of the man behind the distinguished titles and public office.

He was a Chief Justice. He was a statesman. He was a man devoted to justice and to his country. But he was also our father. It is my hope that these photographs will help preserve the memory of the man whose life and example continue to inspire those who serve in Uganda's Judiciary today.

I would like, once again, to extend my sincere gratitude to the Judiciary, the organisers, and everyone who has contributed in different ways to the success of this commemoration.

Thank you for remembering our father and for continuing to honour his life and legacy. ●

Josephine Kiwanuka is a daughter of the late Chief Justice Benedicto Mugumba Kiwanuka



The father I lost when I was five-years-old

I was only five years old when my father was taken from us. He had gone to his chambers that morning, as he did every day, not knowing that he would not return home. Army men came for him, took him away, and put him in the boot of a car. We never saw him again.

By Maxencia Kiwanuka

At the time, we were living in the government residence in Nakasero, the beautiful house that came with his position as Chief Justice. I was too young to fully understand what was happening, but I remember my mother packing our belongings. I remember leaving that house and moving to our home in Rubaga, a house my parents had built. For a five-year-old child, it was simply a change of home. Only much later did I begin to understand that we were not simply moving houses. Our lives had been shattered.

Uganda had lost a man who had served as its first Prime Minister and later as its first Chief Justice. Yet to me, he was not a Prime Minister, a Chief Justice, or a historical figure. He was my father. I was his last-born child, and I lost him at an age when I was only beginning to know who he was.

Every September, when Ugandans remember my father and write about his contribution to the country, I experience a mixture of emotions. There is pride in knowing that the man I called Dad occupies such an important place in Uganda's history. There is gratitude for the way his life continues to be remembered. But there is also a sadness that never completely leaves me. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like to grow up with him, to hear his voice, to ask him questions, to have his guidance, and simply to know my father as an adult rather than only through the memories of a little girl and the stories told by others.



Benedicto Kiwanuka, Uganda's first Prime Minister & Chief Justice, with his beloved wife Maxencia Zalwango and their children in the 1950s/60s. Courtesy Photo.



Every September, Uganda remembers the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice. But beneath all those titles, there is a little girl who lost her father.

Being born to such a man comes with expectations. His name carries a history, and with that history comes a certain weight. People naturally wonder whether his children will follow in his footsteps. I have six older brothers, five of whom have now passed away. Losing so many members of my family has made me deeply aware of how fragile life is and



Maxencia Kiwanuka. Courtesy Photo.

how much of our family's history has disappeared with those we have lost. As the last-born, I sometimes feel that I carry a particular connection to a past that I was too young to understand.

My father's death shaped my life in ways I could never have understood at five years old. I grew up with his absence, but also with his name. I grew up hearing about the man he was, the principles he stood for, and the sacrifices he made. The country remembers the statesman.

Every September, Uganda remembers the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice. But beneath all those titles, there is a little girl who lost her father.

That little girl was me. And even after all these years, I still miss the father I never had the chance to know. ●

Maxencia Kiwanuka is a daughter of the late Chief Justice Benedicto Mugumba Kiwanuka



How Benedicto Kiwanuka's Legacy Is Reshaping Appellate Justice

On September 21, 1972, armed soldiers stormed the High Court chambers of Benedicto Kiwanuka Kagimu, the first Ugandan Chief Justice. They whisked him away, and he has never been seen again. His crime? Refusing to compromise the principles of justice even when faced with the murderous tyranny of Idi Amin's regime.

Fifty-four years later, Kiwanuka's ghost haunts and inspires a quiet revolution unfolding in the very corridors of justice he walked. His sacrifice for judicial independence and the rule of law has become the moral fuel for one of the most significant transformations in Uganda's appellate history: the systematic embrace of mediation as a vehicle for people-centred justice.

And at the heart of this revolution stands one-man, Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire of the Court of Appeal whose vision and persistence, working alongside an unlikely partner from California, birthed East Africa's first formal appellate mediation programme.

The Martyr's Mandate

"Benedicto Kiwanuka's legacy underscores the vital importance of judicial independence and the rule of law, even under oppressive pressure, his refusal to compromise his principles shows that justice must never yield to power," Chief Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo said during the 8th Benedicto Kiwanuka Memorial Lecture in 2025. "His sacrifice highlights the personal cost of integrity, reminding us that true leaders put the common good above self-interest."

That "common good" is now being realised through a transformative approach to appellate justice. The Court of Appeal's Appellate Mediation Programme, launched as a pilot in 2017, has grown



HW Margaret Wagana

Research Magistrate

into a formidable engine of dispute resolution, settling 23 appeals during a single Settlement Fortnight in June 2026 the equivalent of an entire civil appellate session.

A Vision takes root

The story of this revolution begins not in Uganda's corridors of power, but in a partnership forged with Pepperdine University's Strauss Institute of Dispute Resolution ranked as America's premier institution for alternative dispute resolution.

In 2016, Justice Kiryabwire, who had been lobbying tirelessly for appellate mediation, secured a crucial breakthrough. Pepperdine University sponsored a training programme for High Court and Court of Appeal justices, conducted by Prof. Jim Gash and Mr. Peter Sherwood. "The mechanism is becoming more successful in the High Court and we too at the Court

of Appeal have a backlog and feel that if it is applied, it will go a long way to resolve cases quickly instead of wasting five years waiting for a decision," Justice Kiryabwire declared at the time.

That training was the seed. What followed was a partnership that would reshape Uganda's justice landscape.

The maiden attempt

On September 11, 2017, the Court of Appeal made its maiden attempt at appellate mediation. Deputy Chief Justice emeritus, Steven Kavuma and Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, who headed the newly established Appellate Court Mediation programme, handled 31 and 30 cases respectively, settling 61 appeals in a single day.

"Because of the backlog of cases at Court of Appeal, we found out that it is still possible for parties to resolve their disputes without court hearing and making judgment in civil cases," Justice Kiryabwire explained during the launch. "Mediation resolves cases more quickly and allows people to resolve their own cases and reconcile with each other without involving lawyers".

This was East Africa's first formal appellate mediation pilot programme, and it worked.

The institutional partnership deepens

The Pepperdine connection was no fleeting arrangement. In 2024, 71



mediators were commissioned and deployed across Uganda's courts including the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and High Court divisions after training by Pepperdine's Strauss Institute. Among those trained and deployed were sitting judges, retired justices, and senior lawyers, including Minister for Justice Norbert Mao and former Attorney General Fred Ruhindi.

Chief Justice Owiny-Dollo noted that the team of mediators "was trained by the Straus Institute of Pepperdine University in the USA, which he described as the best institution for ADR in America and the whole world".

The partnership has since expanded continent-wide. In March 2024, the Sudreau Global Justice Institute (housed within Pepperdine's Caruso School of Law) convened chief justices from across Africa in Kampala, leading to the formation of the Africa Chief Justices' ADR Forum, with Pepperdine serving as the Forum's official partner, trainer, and capacity builder. The roots of this collaboration trace back to the early 2000s, when Pepperdine law students first sought opportunities to serve alongside Uganda's judiciary.

In February 2025, the East African Court of Justice signed its own Memorandum of Understanding with Pepperdine University to advance ADR capacity building.

The numbers tell the story

The framework is now codified in the Judicature (Court-Annexed Mediation) Rules, which provide a comprehensive structure for appellate mediation. Parties to any civil appeal or application may voluntarily submit their dispute for mediation at any stage before judgment and critically, they may select their own mediator.

The results speak volumes. As of August



2022, the Court had 97 cases pending appellate mediation, and over Shs3 billion had been released back into the economy through mediated settlements. With 266 appeals currently pending under mediation, and 11 new accredited mediators recently added to the roster, the programme continues to expand.

Justice Kiryabwire, serving as Court Administrator, has been a relentless advocate. Speaking at a stakeholders' meeting in Mbarara in May 2026, he outlined the Judiciary's ongoing transformation agenda, calling for faster, people-centred justice delivery and greater use of Alternative Dispute Resolution. He urged stakeholders to familiarise themselves with the new Mediation Rules 2026, describing mediation and community reconciliation as reflections of "traditional African justice approaches that prioritise dialogue and restoration over prolonged conflict".

Justice with courage

Benedicto Kiwanuka's story is not merely one of martyrdom. It is a story of courage that continues to animate the conscience of Uganda's Judiciary. His refusal to yield

to executive pressure was an act of judicial courage that cost him his life.

That same courage now manifests differently: in the courage to innovate, to embrace alternative pathways, to prioritise reconciliation over retribution, and to place the needs of justice-seekers at the centre of the judicial process.

And in Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, working alongside Pepperdine University, that legacy has found its champions, pioneering East Africa's first formal appellate mediation programme and proving that justice, when it serves people, can transform a nation.

A Legacy Secured

"The memory of Benedicto Kiwanuka must not only become a treasure for us to keep and remember with fondness. Rather, we must live up to his legacy," the 2024 lecture urged.

Through the Appellate Mediation Revolution, the judiciary is doing precisely that. It is transforming the sacrifice of one man into a system that serves millions. It is transforming the violence of 1972 into the reconciliation of 2026.

And at the heart of that transformation stands a partnership that began with a vision, a training programme, and a judge who refused to accept that justice had to be slow.

As Bishop Serverus Jjumba declared at the 2025 Kiwanuka memorial mass: "Peace is a function of justice. We must thus work for justice if we want to have real peace."

The Appellate Mediation Revolution is that work. Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, Pepperdine University, and the legacy of Benedicto Kiwanuka are its enduring soul. ●



The Courage to Do Right: Carrying Forward Benedicto Kiwanuka's Legacy

Benedicto Kiwanuka's enduring legacy is not only found in the history books or commemorated at annual memorial lectures. It lives in every judicial officer who chooses the law over convenience, principle over pressure and justice over expediency.

It is 5:30 p.m. The courtroom is quiet. The last litigant has left, the corridors have fallen silent, and a judicial officer remains alone with a difficult file.

The law points in one direction, but the consequences seem to pull in another. Public opinion has already formed. The media has delivered its verdict. Social media is waiting.

Then comes the question that lies at the heart of judicial service: Will I remain faithful to the law when doing so is unpopular?

It is a question that confronts every judicial officer in one form or another. And it is a question that confronted Chief Justice Benedicto Kagimu Mugumba Kiwanuka. He chose fidelity to the law.

On September 21, 1972, Kiwanuka was abducted from his chambers at the High Court in Kampala. He paid the ultimate price, but the principles for which he stood survived him.

More than five decades later, his choice remains both a legacy and a challenge to those entrusted with administering justice.

Judicial power belongs to the people

The Constitution is more than a collection of legal provisions. It represents a covenant that judicial power will be



HW Daphine Ayebare

The author is the President, Uganda Judicial Officers Association

exercised within the law and that every person who comes before the courts will be treated with fairness, dignity and equality.

Judicial independence must therefore be understood not merely as protection for judicial officers, but as protection for the people they serve.

It protects the widow defending her home, the child seeking protection, the accused person confronting the power of the State, and the prisoner whose liberty hangs in the balance.

Each comes to court trusting that the matter will be determined according to the law and evidence, rather than extraneous considerations.

A judicial officer exercises judicial power on behalf of the people of Uganda. That is a sacred trust requiring the courage

to uphold the law without fear, favour, affection or ill will.

That independence must be defended not only when the Judiciary faces public attack, but also when judicial conscience is privately tested by political coercion, social pressure, personal relationships, professional threats, public hostility or other forms of undue influence.

This is the standard Kiwanuka set.

His legacy lives whenever a judicial officer chooses principle over pressure and justice over expediency.

Courage in the everyday administration of justice

Kiwanuka's abduction remains one of the darkest episodes in Uganda's judicial history. Yet it also left an enduring testament to the importance of judicial courage.

The circumstances confronting today's judicial officers may be different, but judicial service is not without its tests.

Heavy caseloads test endurance. Limited resources constrain capacity. Inadequate infrastructure can impede justice delivery. Security concerns, public criticism, misinformation and other pressures can test resolve.

In such circumstances, fidelity to the Judicial Oath becomes even more important.



Judicial courage is not demonstrated only in moments of extraordinary danger. Often, it is found in the ordinary decisions made in courtrooms every day. Behind every file is a person.

A case number may represent someone's liberty, family, livelihood, property or long-running dispute. What may appear to be another file on a court docket can be a life-changing matter for the person waiting for justice.

Integrity in judicial office is therefore not optional. It is the foundation upon which public confidence in the Judiciary rests.

Justice must consequently be more than an abstract promise. It must reach every person who seeks redress from the courts fairly and impartially.

That is how Justice for All becomes a living reality.

Independence needs strong institutions

Individual courage, however, cannot carry the burden alone.

Judicial independence must be supported by strong and dependable institutions. The State and public institutions have a responsibility to respect, safeguard and defend the independence of the Judiciary.

Courts require adequate funding, suitable infrastructure, modern technology and sufficient, well-remunerated human resources.

These are not simply administrative conveniences. They are investments in the effective administration of justice.

Uganda's Judiciary has made significant



Ben Kiwanuka (C) will have a building named after him

strides in this direction through new court infrastructure, expanded court circuits, digitisation initiatives and staff wellness programmes.

Each reform strengthens the institution's capacity to serve the public and, in its own way, advances the ideals for which Kiwanuka stood.

Much has been achieved. Much remains to be done.

His legacy lives in us

Benedicto Kiwanuka's legacy should not be confined to history or remembered only during annual commemorations.

It lives in every judicial officer exercising judicial power on behalf of the people. It lives in every fair hearing, every impartial decision and every litigant treated with dignity.

It is sustained through the seemingly ordinary choices that, repeated over time, define judicial character.

To honour Kiwanuka, therefore, is not simply to remember his courage. It is to

practise the values for which he stood.

Judicial officers must remain committed to administering justice with independence, impartiality, transparency, professionalism, integrity, accountability and equality.

It is not enough that justice is eventually pronounced. Justice must also be administered fairly, promptly, clearly and with dignity.

As Martin Luther King Jr. observed, *"The time is always right to do what is right."*

More than five decades after Kiwanuka made the ultimate sacrifice, that challenge remains.

When confronted by pressure, inconvenience or unpopularity, will we choose what is easy or will we choose what is right?

May we carry Benedicto Kiwanuka's legacy with humility, protect it with integrity and, when tested, have the courage to deliver Justice for All. ●

PICTORIAL



The Chief Registrar, HW Agnes Alum (centre), checks court registers during an inspection visit at Soroti Chief Magistrates Court on July 27, 2026.



Staff of the Judiciary during the bi-weekly health aerobics programme at the Judiciary Headquarters on July 29, 2026.



The Chief Justice, Dr. Flavian Zeija; Deputy Chief Justice, Moses Kazibwe Kawumi; and members of the Judicial Training Institute Governing Council tour the vehicle assembly line at Luwero Industries Limited in Nakasongola on August 7, 2026.



The Deputy Chief Justice, Moses Kazibwe Kawumi (centre), with Justice Margaret Tibulya (left) and Justice Musa Ssekaana (right), during a Court of Appeal weed-out session in Kampala on August 11, 2026.



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (left), and IDLO Country Manager, Ms Barbara Kilei (right), during a guided tour of Kampiringisa National Rehabilitation Centre by the Centre's Director, Ms Teopista Mutooro, on August 12, 2026.



The President of the International Association of Women Judges-Uganda Chapter, Lady Justice Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya, during a visit at Nakawa Chief Magistrates Court on August 17, 2026, where she was popularising an outreach initiative targeting 1,000 families in 1,000 communities within 1,000 days.



THE JUDICIARY

JUDICIARY CLIENT CHARTER: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

YOUR RIGHTS AS A CLIENT

- **RIGHT TO INFORMATION:** Access information upon application.
- **RIGHT TO IDENTITY:** You have a right to know the identity of the staff member serving you.
- **RIGHT TO A HEARING:** A fair, speedy, and public hearing.
- **RIGHT TO FEEDBACK:** Lodge complaints and receive timely responses.
- **RIGHT TO DOCUMENTS:** Receive certified court documents and judgments upon payment of fees.

SERVICE STANDARDS & TIMELINES

- **PUNCTUALITY:** Report on time to attend to your court matter(s).
- **COURTROOM ETIQUETTE:** Observe orderliness and refrain from using offensive language or gestures.
- **ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** Keep phones and other devices off or in silent mode during Court proceedings.
- **DECENCY:** Dress decently; avoid outfits with offensive writings or signs.
- **ZERO TOLERANCE:** Refrain from engaging in corruption and report any unprofessional conduct.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A CLIENT

- **JUDGMENTS:** Court decisions shall be delivered within 60 days after the close of a hearing.
- **BAIL RULINGS:** Delivered within 30 days.
- **BAIL REFUNDS:** Processed within 21 working days from the date of submission.
- **CORRESPONDENCE:** Responses to received letters will be provided within 14 working days.

ESSENTIAL FREE SERVICES

- **Fixing of hearing dates.**
- **Mediation by a Court-accredited mediator.**
- **Processing of bail refund and security deposit funds.**
- **A copy of the Judgment.**
- **Handling administrative and criminal matters.**

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