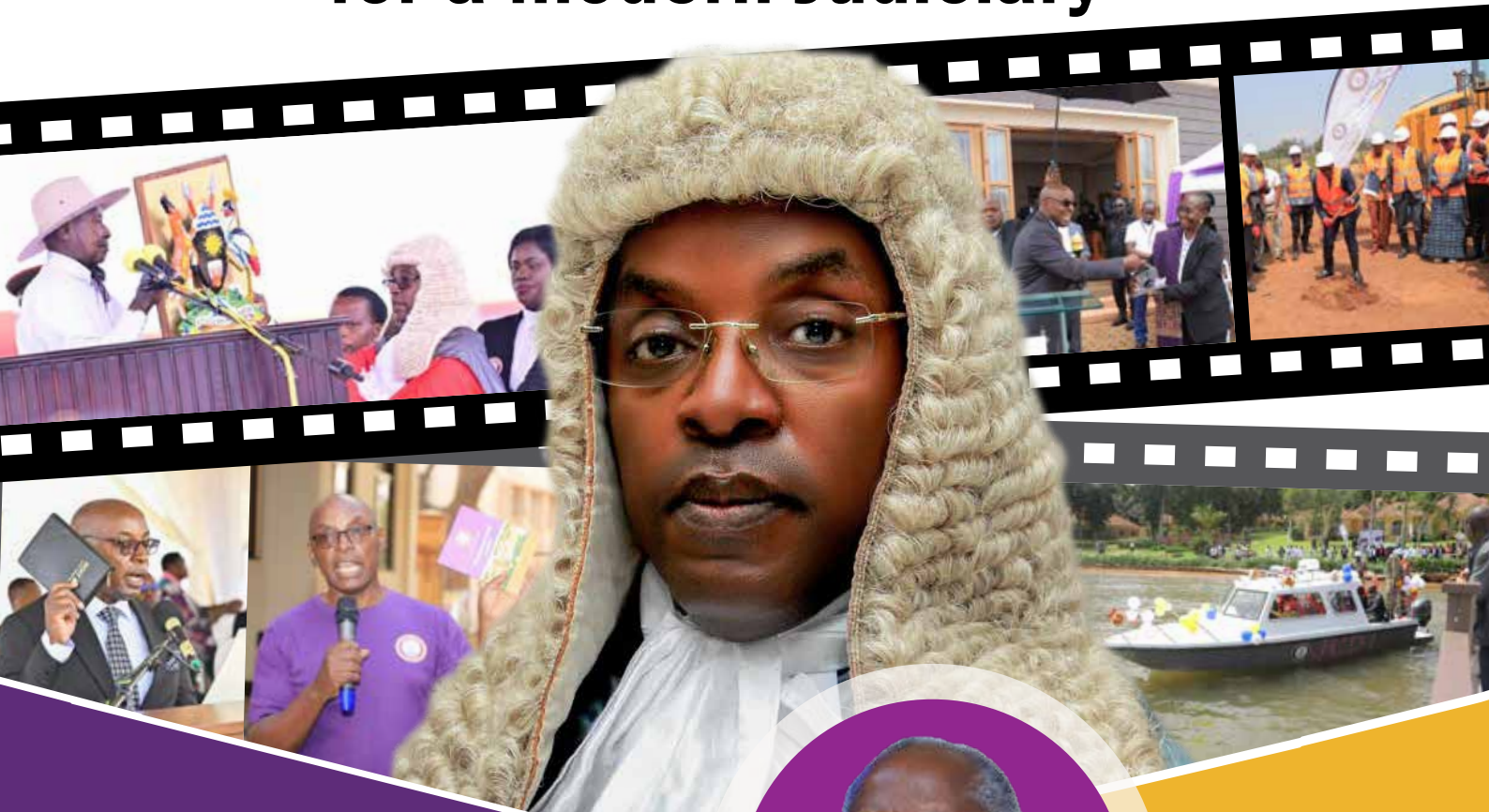




THE JUDICIARY

INSIDER

Chief Justice's blueprint for a modern Judiciary



INSIDE...

- » Digital innovation, legal reform, and ADR transform Uganda's Judiciary
- » **Justice Frederick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende:** The quiet reformer who steered the Judiciary into the digital age



PICTORIAL



Front row: L-R: Chief Justice Emeritus, Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo, First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Janet Museveni, President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and Chief Justice, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija. Back row: Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo; Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana, then Acting Chief Registrar HW Lamunu Pamella Ocaya in a group photograph at the swearing-in ceremony of the Chief Justice on January 24, 2026.



A Judiciary that listens, serves and delivers

It is with great honour and a profound sense of responsibility that I welcome you to this edition of the Judiciary Insider.

The administration of justice is not only about the decisions rendered in our courtrooms; it is about the confidence that the people of Uganda place in the institutions entrusted with upholding the rule of law. Every registry, courtroom, judicial officer and member of staff contributes to the larger mission of ensuring that justice is accessible, efficient, fair and timely.

The Judiciary is undergoing a period of significant transformation. Guided by the Sixth Judiciary Strategic Plan, we are embracing innovation, strengthening accountability, and expanding access to justice through digital transformation, Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, performance enhancement initiatives, and the continuous improvement of our court infrastructure and services.

This edition captures some of the remarkable milestones that continue to shape our institution. From the expansion of the Small Claims Procedure, which has returned billions of shillings to businesses and households, to the growth of Court-Annexed Mediation, the rollout of digital case management systems, and our sustained efforts to reduce case backlog, these stories demonstrate a Judiciary that is responsive to the needs of the people it serves.

Equally important are the stories of the men and women behind these achievements—the judicial officers, registrars, researchers, administrators and support staff whose dedication and professionalism sustain the daily work of the courts. Their commitment reminds us that justice is ultimately a service to humanity.

As Chief Registrar, I remain committed to strengthening the engine room of the Judiciary by promoting integrity, discipline, innovation and excellence in service delivery. Together, we must continue to foster a culture of professionalism, teamwork and accountability while remaining sensitive to the expectations of the citizens who depend on us.

This magazine is therefore more than a record of our activities; it is a reflection of our collective journey towards building a Judiciary that listens, serves and delivers.

I extend my appreciation to all our judicial officers, staff, justice sector partners and stakeholders for their unwavering support and contribution to this shared vision. As we move forward, let us continue to work together to ensure that every justice seeker experiences a justice system that is accessible, efficient, transparent and worthy of public trust.

Agnes Alum
Chief Registrar/Editor-in-Chief

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CJ Dr. Flavian Zeija’s blueprint for a modern Judiciary

When Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija took the oath of office as Chief Justice of Uganda, he inherited the leadership of an institution at a critical stage of transformation. The Judiciary had made significant strides in expanding access to justice, embracing technology, and reducing case backlog. Yet the challenges of growing public demand, increasing caseloads, and the need for greater efficiency remained.

At his swearing-in ceremony on January 24, 2026, the new Chief Justice outlined an ambitious vision. One that seeks to take justice closer to the people, modernise court operations, and transform the Judiciary into a service-oriented institution responsive to the needs of every Ugandan.

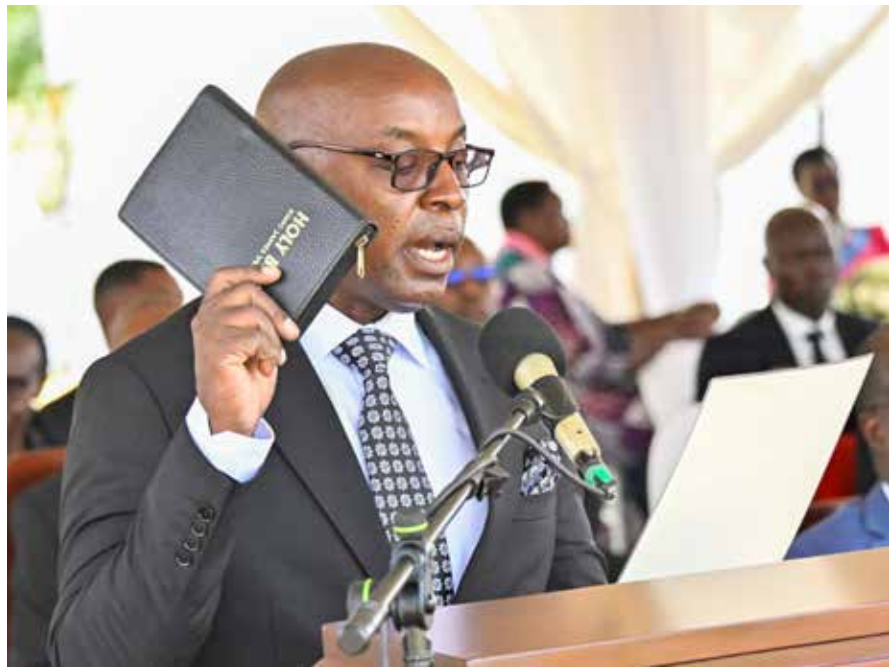
Taking justice closer to the people

At the heart of Justice Zeija’s vision is the belief that justice should not be a distant service accessible only to a few. Instead, courts should be present wherever Ugandans live and work.

To achieve this, he pledged to operationalise regional stations of the Court of Appeal, complete the establishment of High Court circuits across the country, and strengthen magisterial areas to ensure that justice services are available closer to the communities that need them most.

His commitment reflects a growing recognition that physical access to courts remains a critical factor in ensuring that citizens can effectively exercise their constitutional rights. For many Ugandans, particularly those in rural areas, the cost and inconvenience of travelling long distances to seek justice can be a significant barrier.

By extending the Judiciary’s footprint



Hon. Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, during his swearing-in ceremony as Chief Justice of Uganda on January 24, 2026.

nationwide, Justice Zeija aims to make courts more accessible, more visible, and more responsive.

Champion further legal Reform

The Chief Justice also intends to champion further legal and procedural reforms aimed at improving efficiency in the administration of justice. These reforms will include reviewing and updating outdated procedural rules and case management practices that contribute to delays, streamlining litigation processes by reducing unnecessary procedural steps.

Building courts around service

The Chief Justice has repeatedly emphasised that modern courts must be measured not only by the quality of their decisions but also by the quality of service they provide.

His vision is anchored on three core pillars: certainty of hearing and trial dates, efficiency in service delivery, and a culture of service throughout the institution.

To drive this agenda, he proposed the establishment of a Judiciary Delivery Unit,



a specialised mechanism responsible for tracking the implementation of projects, monitoring institutional performance, coordinating knowledge-sharing, and ensuring that strategic objectives are translated into measurable results.

The delivery unit is intended to create a culture of accountability and execution, ensuring that commitments made by the Judiciary are followed through and achieved.

A specialised court for a developing nation

As Uganda continues to invest heavily in infrastructure development, environmental protection, and public utilities, disputes in these sectors are expected to increase.

Recognising this reality, Justice Zeija proposed the creation of an Environmental, Infrastructure and Utilities Division of the High Court. The specialised Division would handle disputes arising from infrastructure

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At his swearing-in ceremony, the new Chief Justice outlined an ambitious vision, one that seeks to take justice closer to the people, modernise court operations, and transform the Judiciary into a service-oriented institution responsive to the needs of every Ugandan.

projects while also addressing environmental matters that increasingly require specialised judicial expertise.

The move reflects a broader global trend toward specialised courts capable of resolving complex disputes efficiently while supporting national development goals.

Reimagining Labour Justice

Among the Chief Justice’s key priorities for the year is the transformation of the Industrial Court into a modern, efficient, and responsive institution capable of delivering timely labour justice.

Recognizing the critical role the Court plays in maintaining harmonious labour relations and protecting livelihoods, the Chief Justice intends to spearhead reforms aimed at restructuring and strengthening the Court’s operations. Central to this agenda will be the digitalization of court processes and the pursuit of legal reforms designed to enhance efficiency, reduce delays, and improve access to justice.

“Top of my priorities for this year will be seeing how the Industrial Court can be restructured, modernized and supported to resolve labour disputes in a timely manner,” the Chief Justice says. “Our focus will be on digitalization and legal reforms to enable the Court



The Chief Justice of Uganda, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, greets the Acting Chief Registrar, HW Pamela Lamunu Ocaya, as other dignitaries look on during the opening of the New Law Year at the Judiciary Headquarters, Kampala, on February 6, 2026.



to efficiently protect the rights of both employers and employees.”

The envisioned reforms are expected to position the Industrial Court as a model of specialized adjudication, one that is equipped to respond swiftly to the evolving world of work while fostering confidence among workers, employers, investors, and the wider public.

Listening to court users

A recurring theme in Justice Zeija’s vision is the importance of understanding the experiences of those who interact with the justice system.

To achieve this, he pledged to institutionalise independent Court User Surveys that will assess both the efficiency and effectiveness of Judiciary services. The surveys are expected to provide valuable insights into public perceptions, identify service gaps, and guide reforms aimed at improving customer satisfaction.

The initiative aligns with his broader commitment to ensuring that the Judiciary remains accountable to the people it serves.

Reimagining case management

Delays in the disposal of cases remain one of the greatest challenges facing justice systems worldwide.

Justice Zeija has identified improved case management as a central pillar of his reform agenda. He pledged to streamline court processes, reduce case processing timelines, and introduce mechanisms that eliminate unnecessary delays.

Among his proposals is the introduction of a case-sieving system at the point of registration. Such a system would help identify matters that do not belong in the court system or that could be resolved

“

Justice Dr. Zeija’s vision is ambitious, technology-driven, and firmly rooted in the principles of accessibility, accountability, and service.

through alternative mechanisms, thereby reducing congestion and allowing judicial resources to focus on deserving cases.

The goal is simple but transformative: quicker hearings, faster judgments, and greater public confidence in the justice system.

Driving a digital revolution

Perhaps the most ambitious aspect of Justice Zeija’s vision lies in technology.

Building upon the foundations laid through the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS), he envisions a Judiciary that is fully digital, data-driven, and technologically advanced.

His plans include developing locally managed ICT systems, introducing artificial intelligence-powered transcription and voice recognition tools, and exploring AI-assisted judgmentwriting technologies. These innovations are intended to reduce administrative burdens, improve efficiency, and free judicial officers to focus on substantive legal work.

He has also proposed the creation





of a Judicial Digital Map that would provide real-time information about court stations, their locations, and daily activities. Complementing this would be a Judiciary Situation Room, an advanced monitoring hub capable of tracking performance indicators, ICT infrastructure, customer feedback, and resource utilisation across all court stations in real time.

Together, these initiatives represent a bold effort to harness technology as a tool for transparency, efficiency, and better decision-making.

Ensuring Virtual hearing

As part of his reform agenda, the Chief Justice has prioritized the expansion of virtual court services and the modernization of judicial processes. The Judiciary plans to progressively equip courts with audio-visual facilities to



Lady Justice Jacqueline Mwendha presides over a virtual bail hearing during the commissioning of the video conferencing system at the High Court in Mukono on 14 May 2025.

enable virtual hearings at all levels of the court system. While virtual proceedings are already being conducted at the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, several High Court Divisions and circuits, and selected lower courts, the long-term goal is to extend this capability nationwide. This initiative is expected to reduce the cost and inconvenience of travel for litigants and other court users while enhancing access to justice.

Towards a paperless Judiciary

Justice Zeija has made no secret of his determination to eliminate paper-based processes from court operations.

His vision is for every judicial officer to have access to a functioning laptop and reliable internet connectivity, enabling courts to operate entirely through digital platforms. Funds traditionally spent on paper and stationery, he argues, can instead be redirected toward strengthening internet infrastructure and digital tools.

The transition to paperless operations has already begun in the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and the Commercial Court, among others. The Chief Justice believes that extending this model across the Judiciary will significantly enhance efficiency while reducing operational costs.

Raising the standard of service

While technology and infrastructure feature prominently in Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija's reform agenda, he has also placed significant emphasis on improving the quality of service delivered by the Judiciary.

One of the key commitments outlined in his vision was the development of a

Judiciary Client Charter, a framework intended to define service obligations, establish clear performance standards, and strengthen accountability to court users. Today, that vision has become a reality. The Judiciary Client Charter has since been developed and operationalised, providing a clear statement of the institution's commitment to delivering quality, timely, and accessible justice services.

Complementing the Charter are the Judiciary Service Delivery Standards, which set measurable benchmarks for service across different levels of the court system. Together, these instruments provide both staff and court users with a clear understanding of the standards expected in the administration of justice.

The Charter and Service Delivery Standards emphasise timely issuance of court calendars and cause lists, prompt hearing and disposal of cases, delivery of judgments within prescribed timelines, speedy processing of court documents, expeditious handling of execution applications, and effective complaints handling mechanisms. They also promote professionalism, courtesy, transparency, and responsiveness in interactions between court staff and the public.

For Chief Justice Zeija, justice is not only about the decisions delivered in courtrooms but also about the experience of those who seek judicial services. The operationalisation of the Client Charter and Service Delivery Standards marks an important step in transforming that vision into practice by ensuring that court users know what to expect from the Judiciary and by holding the institution accountable to those expectations. ●



How Magistrates’ Courts Amendment Act, 2026 will transform the justice landscape

For many Ugandans, access to justice has often meant travelling long distances to High Court stations, incurring substantial litigation costs, and enduring delays caused by congested court dockets. The coming into force of Magistrates’ Courts (Amendment) Act, 2026 marks a significant shift in that narrative, heralding a new era in which justice is brought closer to the people and disputes are resolved more expeditiously within local communities.

The Judiciary welcomed the enactment as a major milestone in implementing the reform agenda championed by the Chief Justice, Hon. Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, whose vision is anchored on making the Judiciary more accessible, responsive and people-centred.

The Act, assented to by President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni on 29 April 2026 and effective from 8 May 2026, gives practical effect to the Chief Justice’s commitment to decentralise justice services and reduce case backlog by ensuring that matters are handled at the most appropriate level of the court system.

Empowering lower courts

At the heart of the reform is a substantial expansion of the pecuniary jurisdiction of magistrates’ courts. Under the new law, the civil jurisdiction of Chief Magistrates has increased from UGX 50 million to 10,000 currency points (UGX 200 million), while Magistrates can now hear matters whose subject value does not exceed 5,000 currency points (UGX 100 million).

The revised thresholds acknowledge that the previous limits, last reviewed in 2007, had long been overtaken by inflation and economic growth. Consequently, numerous disputes that ought to have been determined by lower courts were instead filed in the High Court, exacerbating delays and contributing to mounting case backlog.

By empowering magistrates to handle higher-value commercial, land, family

and civil disputes, the amendments are expected to significantly decongest the High Court and facilitate quicker disposal of cases. More importantly, litigants will no longer have to travel great distances to access justice, thereby reducing the cost and inconvenience associated with litigation.

An efficient court structure

The amendments also streamline the structure of magistrates’ courts by formally abolishing the position of Magistrate Grade II, leaving only two ranks at that level; Chief Magistrate and Magistrate. This aligns the law with the Judiciary’s approved staffing structure.

In addition, the Act enhances the powers of magistrates to impose higher fines and introduces transitional provisions to facilitate the implementation of the reforms.

From technicalities to substantive justice

One of the most progressive aspects


of the legislation is the introduction of powers enabling Chief Magistrates’ Courts to withdraw and transfer cases. Previously, courts that lacked jurisdiction had little choice but to dismiss matters outright, compelling litigants to refile cases in another court and incur additional expenses.

The new law allows Chief Magistrates to transfer suitable matters to the High Court or redistribute cases among magistrates within the same magisterial area whenever just cause exists. This flexibility is expected to improve case flow management, reduce procedural bottlenecks and support the timely disposal of matters.

To ensure a seamless transition, pending cases before the High Court or Chief Magistrates’ Courts may also be transferred to appropriate magistrates’ courts where hearings have not commenced or where the court determines that such transfer would be fair. The Chief Justice is mandated to issue practice directions to guide this process.

Planning for better service delivery

The Act empowers the Chief Justice, acting on the advice of the Judiciary Council, to designate magisterial areas and Magistrates’ Courts through statutory instruments. This measure is expected to strengthen planning, improve deployment of judicial officers and enhance coordination of court services across the country. ●


The Act, assented to by President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni on 29 April 2026 and effective from 8 May 2026.



Telling the Courts story through performance

Highlights of the 2024/2025 Judiciary Annual Performance Report

Uganda's Judiciary continues to accelerate its transformation into a modern, citizen-centred institution, one driven by improved funding, digital innovation, expanded access, and strengthened accountability. The release of the Judiciary Annual Performance Report for Financial Year 2024/25 offered a clear snapshot of how sustained investment and deliberate reforms are reshaping justice delivery nationwide.

Launching the report at the Supreme Court in September 2025, then Chief Justice, Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo, described the report as both a public accountability tool and a roadmap for continuous improvement.

"This Report represents our commitment to enhancing access to justice to the people of Uganda. It provides valuable insights into the outcomes we have achieved, the progress we have made, and the areas which we undertake to make further improvements," the Chief Justice said.

The Report marked the close of the Fifth Judiciary Strategic Plan (JSP V), which focused on expanding access to courts, strengthening institutional capacity, digitising court processes, improving coordination and enhancing public trust in the justice system.

A stronger financial foundation for justice

Government support remained a key catalyst for reform. During FY2024/25, the Judiciary's budget increased by 12.7 percent, rising from UGX 392.546 billion to UGX 442.263 billion. The additional resources enabled recruitment of more judicial officers and staff, expansion of Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, rollout of digital systems, and operationalisation of new High Court Circuits.

"All these funds have been put to good use and I will shortly report the progress we have registered with this support," the Chief Justice stated during the launch.

New High Court Circuits were operationalised in Entebbe, Kumi, Wakiso, Patongo and Lugazi, taking High Court services closer to communities.

Reliable data for smarter justice planning

To strengthen evidence-based planning, the Judiciary undertook the National



Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo during the launch of the Judiciary Annual Performance Report on September 6, 2025.



Justice actors during the launch of the Fifth Annual Performance Report 2024/2025.

Court Case Census 2025, a nationwide exercise aimed at cleaning and consolidating case data across all courts. The census improved the accuracy and consistency of judicial statistics, allowing for better deployment of resources and more informed policy decisions. This intervention has strengthened performance monitoring and enhanced institutional accountability.

Performance that tells a story

In FY2024/25, courts had a total caseload of 450,124 cases — including 279,630 newly registered matters and 170,494 brought forward cases. Of these, 259,331 cases were concluded, achieving a 58 percent disposal rate.

Backlog reduced to 24.20 percent, down from 26.32 percent in the previous year. Criminal matters recorded the highest disposal rate at 62.83 percent, while land cases remained comparatively

slower due to complexity, and volume.

“Over the last five years, the Judiciary has witnessed steady growth in both case registration and case disposal, with notable improvement in FY2024/25,” the Chief Justice observed, attributing gains to expanded court sessions, plea bargaining camps, mediation uptake and Small Claims Procedure courts.

Digital courts, faster justice

Technology continues to redefine the Judiciary’s operational efficiency. During the year:

- **ECCMIS** was rolled out to **23 courts**, supported by digital kiosks and service desks.
- **53 video-conferencing systems** were installed in **21 courts and 18 prisons**.
- **93 digital recording and transcription systems** are operational in **44 courts**.

- The **Judgment Writing Tool** reached **75 percent completion**, strengthening consistency and quality of judicial writing.

These systems reduce physical bottlenecks, improve transparency, and shorten turn-around times for court users.

ADR delivering real impact

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) remains a major driver of backlog reduction and economic efficiency:

- **3,760 criminal cases** were concluded through plea bargaining, achieving a **75.2 percent clearance rate**.
- **24,976 cases** were resolved under the **Small Claims Procedure**, recovering more than **UGX 19.5 billion** for litigants.
- **6,803 cases** were successfully mediated, unlocking economic value and restoring relationships.



SIDE BAR

Performance snapshot

- Total Caseload: **450,124 cases**
- Cases Disposed: **259,331**
- Disposal Rate: **58%**
- Backlog: **24.20%** (down from 26.32%)

Digital transformation

- ECCMIS: **23 courts**
- Video-conferencing: **53 systems** (21 courts, 18 prisons)
- Digital Recording: **93 systems** (44 courts)
- Judgment Writing Tool: **75% complete**

ADR Impact

- Plea Bargaining: **3,760 cases concluded**
- Small Claims: **24,976 cases resolved, UGX 19.5bn recovered**
- Mediation: **6,803 cases concluded**

Infrastructure expansion

- **Completed:** Rukungiri HC, Budaka CMC
- **Ongoing:** Soroti, Tororo, Lyantonde, Alebtong, Karenga, Adjumani

These mechanisms continue to decongest courts while offering affordable and timely justice pathways.

Expanding physical access to justice

Court infrastructure development remained a priority. New court buildings

were completed in Rukungiri and Budaka, while major projects progressed in Soroti, Tororo, Lyantonde, Alebtong, Karenga and Adjumani. Renovation works enhanced functionality and user experience in multiple court stations.

Strengthening integrity and public confidence

Institutional accountability remained robust:

- **349 inspections** were conducted nationwide.
- **1,288 complaints** were registered, with over **92 percent resolved**.
- **69 disciplinary cases** were concluded, reinforcing professional standards.

Public trust in the justice system rose from 67 percent to 71 percent, while average remand time reduced from 20.2 months to 17.3 months, reflecting tangible justice sector gains.

Persistent challenges and the road ahead

Despite progress, challenges persist, including staffing gaps (only 32 percent of approved staffing levels filled), limited automation coverage (ECCMIS operational in 11.5 percent of courts), infrastructure constraints, and rising caseloads.

As the Judiciary transitions into the fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV) period, priorities include expanding ADR, rolling out ECCMIS to at least 20 additional courts, constructing Regional Court of Appeal buildings in Mbarara and Gulu, improving judicial mobility, and expanding alternative power solutions.

“Let us reflect on our achievements, acknowledge areas for improvement and renew our commitment to serving the public with integrity,” the Chief Justice urged in his closing remarks. ●



The Chief Justice, Dr. Flavian Zeija launching the Judgment Writing Tool,



Digital innovation, legal reform, and ADR transform Uganda’s Judiciary

The Permanent Secretary and Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana, has commended the contribution of digital innovation, legal reforms, and infrastructure development in providing faster and more equitable justice in Uganda. “Justice in Uganda is no longer confined to the courtroom,” Dr. Bigirimana asserted. “It is now as close as a computer screen, a click, or a courthouse in your own district.”



Dr. Pius Bigirimana, Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary,

With firm conviction, he described the Judiciary as undergoing one of its most profound transformations in decades. The ongoing shift from manual systems to digital platforms, the integration of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and the unprecedented construction of courts nationwide are reshaping access to justice for ordinary Ugandans.

“These reforms,” he emphasised, “are not simply administrative adjustments. They represent a national commitment to make justice faster, fairer and closer to the people, in alignment with Uganda’s Vision 2040 and broader national development priorities.”

Taking courtrooms online

Technology sits at the centre of this reform effort. The rollout of online case filing and video-conferencing, particularly for prisoners, has markedly streamlined judicial processes.

“This system frees judicial manpower to address more cases, reduces the logistical and financial burden of transporting inmates, and ultimately lowers litigation costs,” Dr. Bigirimana noted.

“The shift to technology-driven services is part of the Government’s resolve to enhance efficiency and promote zero



Launch of the go-live event of Performance Enhancement Tool at Supreme Court Building Conference Hall on October 17, 2025.

tolerance for corruption within the Judiciary.”

He added that the rules governing online hearings were gazetted earlier this year; giving legal force to virtual appearances. As a result, family members, lawyers, and the public can now follow court proceedings remotely from any location with internet access.

What began as a pilot in a few Kampala-based courts has expanded to 13 court stations, including the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and six High Court divisions—Land, Commercial, Anti-Corruption, and Criminal—alongside

Luwero High Court, the Chief Magistrates’ Courts of Mengo and Buganda Road, the Standards, Utilities and Wildlife



Construction progress of Rakai High Court and Chief Magistrates’ Court.



Court, and the Law Development Centre Magistrates' Court.

"The shift to technology-driven services," Dr. Bigirimana observed, "is part of the Government's resolve to enhance efficiency and promote zero tolerance for corruption within the Judiciary." He added that this digital transition aligns closely with the NRM Manifesto (2021–2026), which explicitly identifies remote adjudication as a key pillar of judicial modernisation.

Infrastructure expansion nationwide

Beyond digitisation, the Judiciary is expanding its physical presence. Since July 2021, an extensive programme of construction and renovation has been underway.

Ongoing projects include judicial facilities in Kole and Kibale; High Court buildings in Tororo and Soroti; Chief Magistrates' Courts in Alebtong and Lyantonde and a Magistrates' Court in Abim. The Moroto Chief Magistrate's Court has also been refurbished.

"When communities see a modern courthouse rising in their area, they see government presence, accountability, and hope," Dr. Bigirimana remarked.

Justice for the people

For Dr. Bigirimana, these reforms are ultimately about restoring public trust in the justice sector. He attributes the Judiciary's progress to the combined effect of technology adoption, institutional reforms, and increased staffing, all aimed at reducing backlogs and overcoming longstanding inefficiencies. "The reforms we are implementing are not just modernising the Judiciary," he stressed. "They are transforming it into a people-centred institution committed to accountability, efficiency, and access to justice for all Ugandans."

A system re-energised

Average case completion has risen to this on account of electronic case

management, says PS.

The Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) has produced swift and tangible results.

Case filings have increased by 20.6%, while the average case completion rate has risen by 17.5%. At the same time, Non-Tax Revenue collections have grown from UGX 5 billion to UGX 9.2 billion—growth he attributes to the transparency and integrity of digital filing and payment mechanisms.

"This has helped us curb corruption," he said. "Cases are filed, and fees are paid online, eliminating opportunities for middlemen to solicit bribes."

He also highlighted the positive impact of the Administration of the Judiciary Act (2020), which introduced retirement benefits for judicial officers, enhancing morale and institutional stability.

Another key milestone is the digitisation of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal, commissioned in April. "These e-enabled courts have reduced transportation costs, minimised physical appearances, and eased prison congestion by accelerating the hearing process," he noted. ●

“

Justice in Uganda is no longer confined to the courtroom,” Dr. Bigirimana asserted. “It is now as close as a computer screen, a click, or a courthouse in your own district.”



Hearing of the Christopher Okello Onyum case at Ggaba, Kampala, conducted under the Mobile Court initiative.



New vehicles for newly appointed judicial officers.



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (R), cuts the ribbon to launch the Small Claims Procedure Report as Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, Lady Justice Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya (L), HW Pamella Lamunu Ocaya (Ag. Chief Registrar), and Dr. Katja Kerschhaumer look on during the Small Claims Procedure Gala at the Court of Appeal Conference Hall, on November 27, 2025.

Unlocking UGX 14.9 billion and transforming access to Justice in Uganda using SCP

For many Ugandans, justice is not measured by the grandeur of court buildings or the complexity of legal jargon. It is measured by how quickly a debt is recovered, a business dispute resolved, or a livelihood restored. In this regard, the Small Claims Procedure (SCP) has become one of the most transformative judicial reforms.



BY DANIELLE NALUKENGE
Multimedia Officer,
The Judiciary

Late last year, the Judiciary launched the Small Claims Procedure (SCP) Annual Performance and Activity Report for FY2024/25. It revealed a justice mechanism that is not only resolving disputes efficiently but also serving as a powerful engine for economic recovery.

Courts registered 18,322 demand notices and disposed of 19,211 during the year, unlocking UGX 4.63 billion at the pre-hearing stage alone. At claim level, 5,778 cases were filed while 5,765 were disposed of, resulting in an almost perfect clearance rate. Overall, courts recovered UGX 14.9 billion through concluded claims,



returning much-needed resources to households, traders, farmers, SACCOs and small enterprises across the country.

Justice that works for ordinary citizens

SCP was introduced to provide a fast, simple and affordable avenue for resolving commercial disputes valued at not more than UGX 10 million. It primarily handles cases involving unpaid debts, rental disputes and supply of goods and services, matters that directly affect small businesses and ordinary citizens.

From just six pilot Chief Magistrates' Courts when implementation commenced in 2012, the programme has grown into a nationwide initiative. According to the latest report, the Procedure now operates in more than 220 courts across Uganda, a testament to the Judiciary's commitment to expanding access to justice.

Billions unlocked before litigation

One of the most remarkable features of the SCP is its emphasis on early settlement. Before disputes escalate into formal hearings, parties are encouraged to negotiate and voluntarily resolve their differences.

In the FY2024/25 alone, courts registered 18,322 demand notices and disposed of 19,211, achieving a clearance rate of 104.85 per cent while unlocking UGX 4.63 billion at the pre-hearing stage.

This reflects the SCP's growing role as an Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism that saves litigants both time and money while preserving commercial relationships.

Launching the report at the Performance Review and Awards Gala in Kampala, Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo described SCP as a true pillar of people-centred justice.

"These results are not just statistics. They represent school fees paid, businesses revived, debts settled, and relationships restored."

She noted that for many Ugandans, their first encounter with the justice system is through a Small Claims Court, making



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When the SCP was introduced in 2011, it recovered only UGX 1.5 billion in its inaugural year. Fourteen years later, annual recoveries have grown almost tenfold to nearly UGX 15 billion.

speed, fairness and dignity the critical measures of judicial performance.

Faster courts, better outcomes

The report also demonstrates significant improvements in efficiency. Average case disposal time dropped from 151 days to 103 days, while exemplary courts such as Namungalwe and Kalungu consistently delivered judgments within the statutory 30-day timeframe.

At the same time, strong-performing courts including Mengo, Makindye, Nakawa, Kasese and Tororo continued to lead the country in filings and recoveries, demonstrating the growing maturity of the system.

From a pilot to a continental model

Reflecting on the programme's journey, Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, the Chairperson of SCP Implementing Committee noted that when the SCP was introduced in 2011, it recovered only UGX 1.5 billion in its inaugural year. Fourteen years later, annual recoveries have grown almost tenfold to nearly UGX 15 billion.

He attributed much of this success to the Procedure's strong Alternative Dispute Resolution foundation, where mediation and negotiation remain central to dispute settlement.

Justice Kiryabwire said nearly 90 per cent of SCP decisions are honoured voluntarily, reducing enforcement costs and helping restore relationships between disputing parties. He further revealed that Uganda's model has attracted international attention, with countries such as Namibia seeking to benchmark its own system against the country's experience.



Restoring dignity through justice

Her Worship Lamunu Pamela Ocaya, then Acting Chief Registrar, observed that what started as a reform initiative in six courts has grown into a national justice mechanism because of its ability to provide simple, fast and affordable justice.

Quoting the proverb, “When the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind,” she described the SCP as a practical tool for restoring dignity and livelihoods, adding that justice and poverty reduction are closely intertwined.

Assistant Registrar SCP Mastula Mulondo attributed the improved performance to continuous supervision, regional review

“
The Small Claims Procedure was introduced to provide a fast, simple and affordable avenue for resolving commercial disputes valued at not more than UGX 10 million.

meetings, court-based coaching and better data management practices.

A justice reform with a human face

The SCP Registry continues to invest in review meetings, support supervision and targeted sensitisation campaigns to improve performance and ensure that lagging courts are brought on board.

The latest report also notes that women now account for an increasing share of claimants, reflecting the Procedure’s growing inclusivity and relevance to vulnerable groups.

The Performance Review and Awards Gala concluded by recognising outstanding courts, with Hakibaale Magistrate’s Court emerging as the overall best-performing Small Claims Court. ●



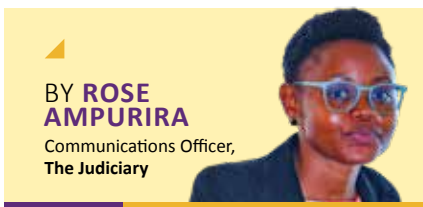
The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, joins different stakeholders in cutting a commemorative cake during the Small Claims Procedure Gala at Court of Appeal Conference Hall on November 27, 2025.



Unveiling the foundation stone during the groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of Mbarara Court of Appeal on July 25, 2025, as the then Deputy Chief Justice, Dr. Flavio Zeija (R), and other justice sector stakeholders look on.

Taking Appellate Justice closer to the people

From time immemorial, access to appellate justice in Uganda largely revolved around Kampala. Litigants seeking to challenge decisions of High Court often faced long journeys, significant expenses, and extended waiting periods, before their appeals could be heard.



Today, however, the Judiciary is undertaking one of the most ambitious reforms in its history, a transformation designed to ensure that appellate justice is not a privilege of proximity to the capital but a service available to all Ugandans, regardless of where they live.

Through the establishment of Court of Appeal Circuits and the construction of the

country's first Regional Courts of Appeal, the Judiciary is redefining how appellate justice is delivered, bringing it closer to communities, reducing costs for litigants, and strengthening public confidence in the administration of justice.

A Vision for decentralised justice

The reform took a significant step forward on October 30, 2025 when the then Chief Justice, Hon. Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny-Dollo, issued Practice Directions establishing regional Court of Appeal Circuits under Article 133(1) (b) of the Constitution. The objective was clear: to improve access to justice,

reduce case backlog, shorten the time required to determine appeals and constitutional petitions, and lower the cost of obtaining justice.

The move marked a historic departure from a centralised appellate system and signalled the Judiciary's commitment to ensuring that justice services are delivered closer to the people they serve.

Eight circuits were established in Arua, Fort Portal, Gulu, Jinja, Masaka, Mbale, Mbarara and Mubende, creating regional centres for appellate justice across the country.



Then Deputy Chief Justice, Hon Dr Flavian Zeija, breaks ground during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Gulu Appellate Court, on July 23, 2025, as judicial officers look on.

Under the new arrangement, appeals arising from designated High Court Circuits are handled within their respective regions, reducing the need for litigants and advocates to travel to Kampala for appellate proceedings.

From circuits to permanent regional appellate courts

While the creation of the circuits established the administrative framework for decentralised appellate services, the Judiciary has moved to create permanent infrastructure that would support the reform for generations to come.

In July 2025, the Judiciary reached another historic milestone when the then Chief Justice presided over groundbreaking ceremonies for Uganda’s first-ever Regional Courts of Appeal

in Gulu and Mbarara. These facilities represent the first permanent regional appellate court complexes in the country and form a critical pillar of the Judiciary’s infrastructure expansion programme.

The projects are intended to reduce congestion at the central Court of Appeal in Kampala while taking appellate services physically closer to millions of Ugandans in Northern and Western Uganda.

Gulu: A historic milestone for Northern Uganda

The groundbreaking ceremony in Gulu attracted judicial officers, Members of Parliament, local leaders, religious leaders, civil society organisations and members of the public. Addressing the gathering, Chief Justice Owiny - Dollo described the project as a historic

milestone for both the Judiciary and the nation.

The Gulu Regional Court of Appeal is expected to serve the Acholi, Lango and neighbouring sub-regions, significantly reducing travel costs and waiting times for litigants seeking appellate services.

The then Deputy Chief Justice, Hon. Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, noted that resident Justices would be stationed at the facility, enhancing the availability of appellate services while stimulating social and economic development within the region.

The Government committed full funding for the project, with construction of the six-storey court complex expected to be completed within 18 months.



An artistic impression of the Gulu Regional Court of Appeal.



An artistic impression of the Mbarara Regional Court of Appeal.



The establishment of Court of Appeal Circuits and Regional Courts of Appeal is among the most consequential reforms in Uganda's justice sector in recent decades.

Mbarara: Strengthening Justice in Western Uganda

Three days later, a similar groundbreaking ceremony was held in Mbarara, bringing together judicial officers, political leaders, local authorities and members of the public.

At the event, the Chief Justice reiterated that decentralisation of appellate courts is central to the Judiciary's transformation agenda. He emphasised that bringing courts closer to the people must go hand in hand with the promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms to reduce case backlog and improve efficiency.

The Deputy Chief Justice highlighted the strategic importance of the site, particularly its proximity to correctional facilities, which will improve the handling of appeals involving prisoners. Meanwhile, local leaders pledged continued support for the project and called for the protection of public land earmarked for justice infrastructure.

Building more than courtrooms

The significance of the Regional Courts of Appeal extends beyond physical buildings.

Each circuit is supported by a robust governance structure. Five Justices are assigned to every Court of Appeal Circuit, while Registrars deployed by the Chief Registrar oversee administrative functions and case management. Heads of Circuits provide leadership and supervision while reporting directly to the Deputy Chief Justice.

The circuits also have Court Users Committees composed of judicial officers, registrars and key justice sector stakeholders. These committees promote communication, coordination and collaboration among justice institutions, while identifying challenges

and recommending reforms to improve service delivery.

This collaborative approach ensures that the decentralisation agenda is not merely about relocating courtrooms but about strengthening the entire justice ecosystem.

The future of appellate justice

The establishment of Court of Appeal Circuits and Regional Courts of Appeal is among the most consequential reforms in administration of justice.

Already, the initiatives have strengthened the Judiciary's decentralisation agenda, increased public awareness of appellate services, and secured strong support from Government, local authorities and justice sector stakeholders.

When completed, the Gulu and Mbarara Regional Courts of Appeal will stand as enduring symbols of a Judiciary committed to accessibility, efficiency and service to the people.

More importantly, they will ensure that justice is no longer measured by the distance one must travel to obtain it, but by the certainty that it is available wherever Ugandans live. ●



What they said!

Ms. Maureen Kasande, Under Secretary, Judiciary, representing the Permanent Secretary



“The Government of Uganda remains firmly committed to strengthening access to justice through sustained investment in modern judicial infrastructure. The Regional Courts of Appeal will not only bring services closer to the people but will also contribute to economic growth, social stability and the rule of law.” “The six-storey court complexes will be delivered under strict Government supervision, and we are confident that the contractors will complete the projects within the stipulated timeframe and to the required standards.”

Hon. Betty Aol Ocan, Woman MP for Gulu City

“For many of our people, accessing justice has meant undertaking costly and exhausting journeys to Kampala. This new Court of Appeal station is a monumental step in bringing justice closer to the people and easing that burden. I also appeal to the contractor to employ local labour and source materials from within the region so that this project creates opportunities and directly benefits our communities.”



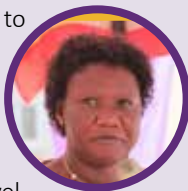
Mr Ambrose Onoria, Resident City Commissioner, Gulu City



“This Court of Appeal station is a beacon of accountability and justice. I commend the Judiciary for its community-focused approach and for bringing such a transformative project to Gulu. This is not only a victory for the people of Gulu but also a significant achievement for the Government as a whole.”

Ms Vicky Atim, Vice Chairperson, Gulu District

“The local government is delighted to witness this important investment in our region. We hope that Gulu’s success will inspire similar developments across the country, ensuring that more Ugandans can access justice without having to travel long distances.”



Rtd. Col. James Mwesigye, Western Regional Commissioner for Resident District Commissioners



“The Judiciary’s transformational agenda is yielding visible results. We are witnessing remarkable improvements in efficiency, accountability, and integrity. I commend the leaders of Mbarara for securing and preserving this land for public use, and I welcome the Judiciary’s continued engagement with local governments in advancing access to justice.”

Mr. Robert Kanusu, Deputy Resident City Commissioner, Mbarara City

“I commend the foresight and commitment of the leaders who safeguarded this land for public development. The establishment of this judicial facility is a testament to what can be achieved when government institutions and local leaders work together for the common good.”



Mr. Robert Mugabe Kakyebi, Mayor of Mbarara City



“We are proud to host such a significant judicial institution in Mbarara. I applaud those who had the vision to preserve this land for future generations, and I urge that the project be completed expeditiously so that our people can begin to enjoy its benefits.”

Mr. Gumisiriza Kyabwiso, Mayor of Mbarara City North Division

“The strong collaboration between the Judiciary and Mbarara City North Division is commendable. As we develop this area, we must remain vigilant in protecting public land. I also encourage the Judiciary to consider incorporating administrative office space to promote a more integrated and concentrated model of government service delivery.”





The Chief Justice, Hon. Dr. Flavian Zeija, during a guided tour of Judicial Training Institute in Nakawa, Kampala led by Justice Prof. Andrew Khaukha and HW Gladys Nakibuule.

The legal framework redefining judicial training

Uganda's Judiciary has taken a decisive step toward strengthening professionalism, independence and institutional capacity with the formal operationalisation of Judicial Training Institute (JTI) under Administration of the Judiciary (Judicial Training Institute) Regulations, 2025.

The Regulations were put in place by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Norbert Mao on November 29, 2025, pursuant to Sections 19 and 39 of Administration of the Judiciary Act, Cap. 4. Their central purpose is to give practical effect to the law establishing JTI as the national hub for specialised and continuous judicial training, capacity building and professional development.

Building the backbone of judicial capacity

For years, the Judiciary has invested heavily in reforms aimed at improving efficiency, accountability and access to

justice. Yet, the sustainability of these reforms depends on one critical pillar: continuous training of judicial officers and staff.

Section 19 of the Act formally establishes the Judicial Training Institute (JTI) as the institution responsible for strengthening the skills, knowledge and professional competence of the Judiciary. The Regulations now translate that mandate into clear operational powers and functions, positioning JTI as a permanent engine of judicial excellence.

Under the new framework, JTI is tasked with providing specialised and

continuous training not only to the Judiciary Service, but also to other persons or institutions approved by the Director. This opens the door for structured engagement with justice sector actors, academia and regional partners, reinforcing Uganda's role in advancing legal scholarship and judicial best practice.

A broad and strategic mandate

The Regulations give JTI a wide and forward-looking mandate. The Institute will enhance staff skills through regular trainings and professional courses, organise conferences and seminars, coordinate training across the Judiciary, and conduct training needs assessments to ensure programmes remain relevant and responsive.

Beyond training, JTI is empowered to undertake research in contemporary national, regional and international jurisprudence, advise the Judiciary and the public, act as a repository of judgments and rulings for training purposes, and publish books, journals, bench books and legal digests. It will also evaluate scholarship applications for judicial staff and undertake any additional functions assigned by the Chief Justice.

This integrated approach links learning, research, publication and policy advisory into one institutional ecosystem, a model aligned with global best practice in judicial development.

Recognising learning and building partnerships

Importantly, the Regulations empower JTI to award certificates of participation and attendance, and to grant other awards authorised by law. The Institute may also affiliate with universities,



degree-awarding and tertiary institutions to promote professional training and academic collaboration.

This provision elevates judicial training from ad-hoc workshops to structured professional accreditation, enabling judicial officers and staff to build recognised learning pathways and career development profiles.

Governance anchored in integrity

To ensure accountability and strategic direction, the Institute will be overseen by a Governing Council appointed by the Chief Justice. The Council will comprise representatives from the Judiciary, Ministry of Education, Judicial Service Commission, Law Council, and two members of the public of high moral character and integrity. The Director of the Institute serves as an ex-officio member without voting rights, while the Chief Justice designates the Chairperson.

This governance structure balances institutional ownership with external oversight, safeguarding independence, transparency and professional standards.



Justices of the Court of Appeal and other judicial officers during a training on the Judgment Writing Tool. The training was organised by Judicial Training Institute in partnership with LexisNexis on March 3, 2026.

Strengthening the justice system from within

For a Judiciary already pursuing digital transformation, performance management reforms, alternative justice systems and decentralised service delivery, the operationalisation of JTI provides the human capital foundation required to sustain these ambitions.

A well-trained Judiciary strengthens public confidence, improves quality of judgments, reduces procedural errors, and enhances consistency in the interpretation of the law. It also nurtures ethical leadership and resilience against corruption and inefficiency, values that sit at the heart of judicial independence.

Looking ahead

As JTI steps into full operational maturity, Uganda positions itself firmly among jurisdictions that recognise that justice is not only delivered in courtrooms, but also forged in classrooms, research halls and professional development spaces.

The Regulations mark more than administrative compliance, they signal a long-term commitment to excellence, integrity and continuous learning within the Judiciary. For court users, justice sector partners and the public, this promises a stronger, more responsive and more trusted justice system for generations to come. ●



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, poses for a group photo with judicial officers, justice actors and mediators during the Alternative Justice Systems training at Acholi Inn, Gulu, on May 4, 2026.



Principal Information Management Officer, Mr Joseph Ssinabulya, sensitises members of the public on the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) at Kayunga Chief Magistrate’s Court during the rollout of the System in Kayunga on October 2, 2025.

How ECCMIS is changing the court experience

For Rhoda Namuwaya, a litigant pursuing a civil matter at Jinja High Court, the rollout of the Electronic Court Case Management Information System at the Court was an answer to prayer. Previously, she had to trek from Kidera, Buyende District, about 160km from Jinja City to follow on her matter. She says, she no longer has to worry about how to get transport to the City as she can check updates on the case file right on her phone.



Ms Namuwaya, with relief on her face, looks admiringly at her smart phone as she taps to show the next course of action on her case file. She says, the updates alone reassure her that her case file is not just shelved somewhere but it is being worked upon.

When Uganda’s Electronic Court Case Management Information System

(ECCMIS) went live on March 1, 2022, it marked more than the introduction of a new digital platform, it signaled the Judiciary’s decisive shift toward a modern, transparent, and citizen-centered justice system.

Designed to automate the entire lifecycle of court cases, from filing and payments to hearings, judgments, and appeals, ECCMIS has quietly transformed how justice is accessed and delivered. Anchored within Chapter 14 of the National Development Plan III, the System today stands as one of the Judiciary’s most impactful governance reforms.

From paper trails to digital pathways

ECCMIS was commissioned on October 19, 2021, before its initial rollout in seven court stations in March 2022. By September 2022, Luweero High Court Circuit had joined the platform to support electronic transfer of files from Kampala-based High Court divisions. These pioneer deployments formed Cluster One, covering the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal/Constitutional Court, Land Division, Commercial Division, Civil Division, Anti-Corruption Division, Luweero High Court, and Mengo Chief Magistrates’ Court.

The shift was immediate. Manual registries



Judicial officers, including newly appointed and transferred officers, during the closing ceremony of the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) training at the Supreme Court Conference Hall, on April 11, 2025.

gave way to secure digital workflows. Litigants gained 24-hour access to e-filing. Advocates tracked cases remotely. Court fees were paid electronically. SMS and email notifications reduced missed hearings and delays. File losses and document manipulation sharply declined.

Scaling the digital Judiciary

By July 2025, ECCMIS had expanded to **31 court stations across five rollout clusters**, implemented through carefully sequenced financial-year phases.

- **Cluster Two (Q1 FY2024/25):** Criminal Division, International Crimes Division, Buganda Road, Standards Utilities & Wildlife, and City Hall Courts.
- **Cluster Three (Q2 FY2024/25):** Family Division, Makindye, Nakawa, LDC, Luwero, and Nateete-Rubaga Courts.
- **Cluster Four (Q3 FY2024/25):** Entebbe High Court, Wakiso High Court, Kiira, Kawempe, Entebbe CM Court, and Nabweru.
- **Cluster Five (Q4 FY2024/25):** Jinja High Court, Jinja CM Court, Bugembe, Kakira, Kagoma, and Lugazi High Court.



Chief Magistrate HW Ritah Neumbe Kidasa (L) hands over an ECCMIS-branded t-shirt to a member of the public for participating in an ECCMIS sensitisation campaign at Kayunga Chief Magistrate’s Court on October 2, 2025.

Each deployment followed a disciplined model: ICT assessments, infrastructure installation, judicial and stakeholder training, data migration from the legacy CCAS system, and post-go-live support. Public sensitisation campaigns were conducted in Jinja, Mukono, and Kayunga, reaching marketplaces and trading centres to explain how ECCMIS reduces transport costs, waiting time, and paperwork for ordinary citizens.

Looking ahead, ECCMIS is scheduled to roll out to Kiboga and Kyankwanzi, supported by intensive training and community sensitisation.

Performance gains that matter

The System’s impact is now measurable. Case registrations increased from 62,916 in FY2023/24 to 63,475 in FY2024/25, with June 2025 alone recording 9,173



Some of the judicial officers during a hands-on training on the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) at the Supreme Court Conference Hall on December 9, 2025.

new cases, nearly double the same month the previous year.

Revenue performance has been equally strong. ECCMIS-enabled collections rose from UGX 1.567 billion in July 2023 to UGX 2.095 billion in July 2024, while March 2025 recorded UGX 2.107 billion, up from UGX 1.707 billion the previous year. The integrated e-payment platform has strengthened accountability and eliminated revenue leakages.

Payment behavior is also shifting

- 49% cash payments
- 40% mobile money and POS transactions
- Growing adoption of electronic funds transfers and demand drafts

This trend reflects gradual public confidence in cashless judicial services.

A growing digital community

ECCMIS adoption continues to accelerate. User accounts increased from 4,477 in March 2022 to over 13,384 registered users. Monthly login sessions peaked at 162,117 in May

2025, demonstrating deep system engagement by judicial officers, advocates, and litigants.

To sustain reliability, the Judiciary invested in digital kiosks, solar backup systems, mobile internet routers, toll-free support lines, and continuous system enhancements, including auto-case registration and prioritisation tools for urgent matters.

Lessons, challenges and institutional maturity

The transition was not without challenges. Internally, resistance to change, limited ICT staffing, and power instability slowed early adoption. Externally, some law firms lacked equipment and initially resisted abandoning manual filing.

These challenges were addressed through targeted recruitment, infrastructure upgrades, continuous training, and stakeholder engagement. Key lessons from early clusters underscored the importance of aligning technology with legal procedures, maintaining data security, and sustaining leadership commitment.



Principal Information Management Officer, Mr Joseph Ssinabulya, sensitises members of the public on ECCMIS during a public awareness campaign in Kayunga Town on October 2, 2025.

A justice reform tool

ECCMIS has become more than an ICT system. It now supports:

- Faster case tracking and reduced adjournments
- Improved transparency and audit trails
- Better revenue accountability
- Reduced opportunities for manipulation
- Enhanced access for remote court users
- Data-driven judicial planning and performance monitoring

The platform aligns seamlessly with the Judiciary's broader reform agenda, including decentralisation, performance management, and citizen trust building.

The digital future of justice

As ECCMIS expands into new regions and integrates with justice sector partners, Uganda is positioning itself as a continental leader in judicial digital transformation. What began as a pilot project has matured into a national platform reshaping institutional culture, service delivery, and public confidence. ●



Ongoing construction works at the Gulu Court of Appeal Building (L) and the Tororo High Court Building (R), part of the Judiciary's infrastructure expansion programme aimed at taking justice services closer to the people.

A peep into court infrastructure revolution

Across Uganda, cranes rise where courtrooms once stood only on paper. Fresh concrete replaces crumbling walls. Solar panels glint on rooftops where darkness once limited court operations. From urban hubs to remote districts, a quiet but profound transformation is reshaping the face of justice.



BY DANIELLE NALUKENGE
Multimedia Officer,
The Judiciary

Since 2021, the Judiciary, through its Engineering and Technical Services Department, has embarked on one of the most ambitious infrastructure expansion programmes in its history. Dozens of court buildings have been constructed, renovated, and modernised, taking justice closer to communities that previously travelled long distances or relied on makeshift facilities. This nationwide investment is redefining what access to justice looks like in practical terms.

Justice built from the ground up

The transformation began with flagship projects that symbolise institutional strength and permanence. The completion of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal buildings provided Uganda's apex courts with modern,

purpose-built homes, reinforcing judicial independence and efficiency.

Beyond the capital, new High Courts in Mukono and Rukungiri extended higher judicial services to growing regional populations, reducing congestion in older stations and significantly cutting travel costs for litigants.

Perhaps most impactful has been the rollout of Justice Centres and Chief Magistrates' Courts in districts such as Patongo, Namayingo, Maracha, Kole, Buhweju, Sheema, Nakaseke, Sembabule, Buyende, Kamwenge, Butambala, Mayuge, and Budaka. For many residents, these facilities represent the first permanent judicial presence in their communities, taking court services within walking or short commuting distance for the first time.

Expanding the legal footprint

The Judiciary's expansion continues at full pace. Construction is underway for Courts of Appeal in Gulu and Mbarara, strengthening regional appellate access

and easing pressure on Kampala-based sessions.

New High Courts in Tororo, Mpigi, and Soroti are also progressing, while additional Chief Magistrates and Grade One Courts are rising in Rakai, Amolatar, Katine, Adwari, Nyarushanje, Rubuguri, Lyantonde, Abim, and Alebtong.

Each new court reduces backlog pressure, shortens hearing timelines, and improves public confidence in the justice system. Physical proximity is translating into faster case disposal, improved attendance of parties and witnesses, and reduced operational costs for both court users and the Judiciary.

Renovating for resilience and dignity

Infrastructure growth has not been limited to new buildings. The Judiciary has undertaken extensive renovation of older facilities to ensure safety, accessibility, and operational efficiency.

Over 30 courts have already been



The Mbarara Court of Appeal (L), Rakai Chief Magistrate’s Court and High Court (R), and Soroti High Court (bottom), reflecting the Judiciary’s commitment to expanding access to justice across the country.



More than buildings

This infrastructure drive is not merely about concrete and steel. It directly supports the Judiciary’s broader reforms — including digital transformation through ECCMIS, backlog reduction strategies, decentralisation of appellate services, and strengthening public trust in justice institutions.

Modern facilities enable:

- Faster case processing and better records management
- Improved security and safe custody of exhibits
- Enhanced working conditions for judicial officers and staff
- Greater accessibility for persons with disabilities
- Stronger community confidence in formal justice systems

Each courthouse becomes a symbol of state presence, rule of law, and civic stability in its locality.

Justice, one courthouse at a time

As Uganda continues to grow socially and economically, the demand for timely, fair, and accessible justice will only intensify. The Judiciary’s infrastructure programme demonstrates foresight, laying foundations that will serve generations of court users, legal professionals, and communities. ●

refurbished, including High Courts in Gulu, Kampala, Mbale, and Lira, alongside Chief Magistrates’ Courts in Ntungamo, Rukungiri, Nabweru, Nakawa, Entebbe, Kamuli, Kumi, Kisoro, Kabale, Hoima, and Luwero, as well as Grade One Courts in Otuke, Apala, and Ngora.

These upgrades have improved working environments for judicial officers and staff, enhanced security, enabled better record management, and created more welcoming spaces for the public — reinforcing the dignity of the justice process itself.

Renovations still in motion

Renovation works remain ongoing in several strategic locations, including High Courts in Mbarara, Fort Portal, and Jinja, and Chief Magistrates’ Courts in Kaberamaido, Bukedea, Moyo, Yumbe, Amuru, and Bushenyi.

These upgrades align with the Judiciary’s long-term vision of standardising court infrastructure nationwide — ensuring consistent service quality regardless of geography.

PICTORIAL



Ms Evas Kobusingye, Client Service Officer, sensitises members of the public on court processes and innovations during a public awareness campaign at Wakiso Chief Magistrate's Court, Wakiso District, on June 20, 2026.



Chief Justice of Uganda, Hon. Dr. Flavian Zeija appending his signature on the Judiciary National Court Case Census 2025 Report, during its launch at Supreme Court Conference Hall, on January 29, 2026.



Lady Justice Elizabeth Alivdza (R) hands over the Constitution of the International Association of Women Judges–Uganda Chapter (IAWJ-UC) to the newly elected President, Lady Justice Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya, during the IAWJ-UC handover ceremony on May 25, 2026.



The Chief Registrar, HW Agnes Alum, (front row C) presided over Law Development Centre Court's first Open Day.



Staff of the Communications and Public Relations Registry present a gift to the Chief Justice Emeritus, Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny - Dollo, during his Special Sitting and Special Luncheon on April 17, 2026.



Emorimor Paul Sande Emolot (L) presents a token of appreciation to the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (R), as the Chief Justice of Uganda, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija (C), looks on during the Soroti High Court Circuit Open Day on March 3, 2026.

PICTORIAL



Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija (L), hands over the court seal to Justice Dr. Winifred Nabisinde during the launch of the Lugazi High Court Circuit in Lugazi on March 2, 2026.



The Acting Chief Registrar, HW Lamunu Pamella Ocaya, presents an Enrolment Certificate to a newly enrolled advocate during an enrolment ceremony held on February 27, 2026.



The Chief Justice having a light moment with Deputy Mufti, Sheikh Muhammad Waiswa (L) as Dr. Rashid Yahya Ssemuddu looks on during the inaugural Judiciary Muslim Association Iftar Dinner at the Judiciary Headquarters, on February 27, 2026.



Judiciary staff participate in the biweekly health aerobics sessions at the Judiciary Headquarters, Kampala, on January 28, 2026.



Justice Rosette Kania presiding over court during the Daily Criminal Hearings at the Criminal Division of the High Court on December 2, 2025.



L-R: Justice Duncan Gaswaga, Justice Michael Elubu, Justice Stephen Mubiru and Justice Dr. Andrew Bashaija, a panel of judges of the International Crimes Division of the High Court, in discussion with counsel during the hearing of applications in the Joseph Kony and Thomas Kwoyelo cases at the High Court of Uganda, Kampala, on October 3, 2025.



Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire (C) presiding over a panel hearing during a special Court of Appeal sitting held in honour of Justice Fredrick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende (R), ahead of his retirement at the Court of Appeal in Kampala on May 15, 2026.

Justice Frederick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende: The quiet reformer who steered the Judiciary into the digital age

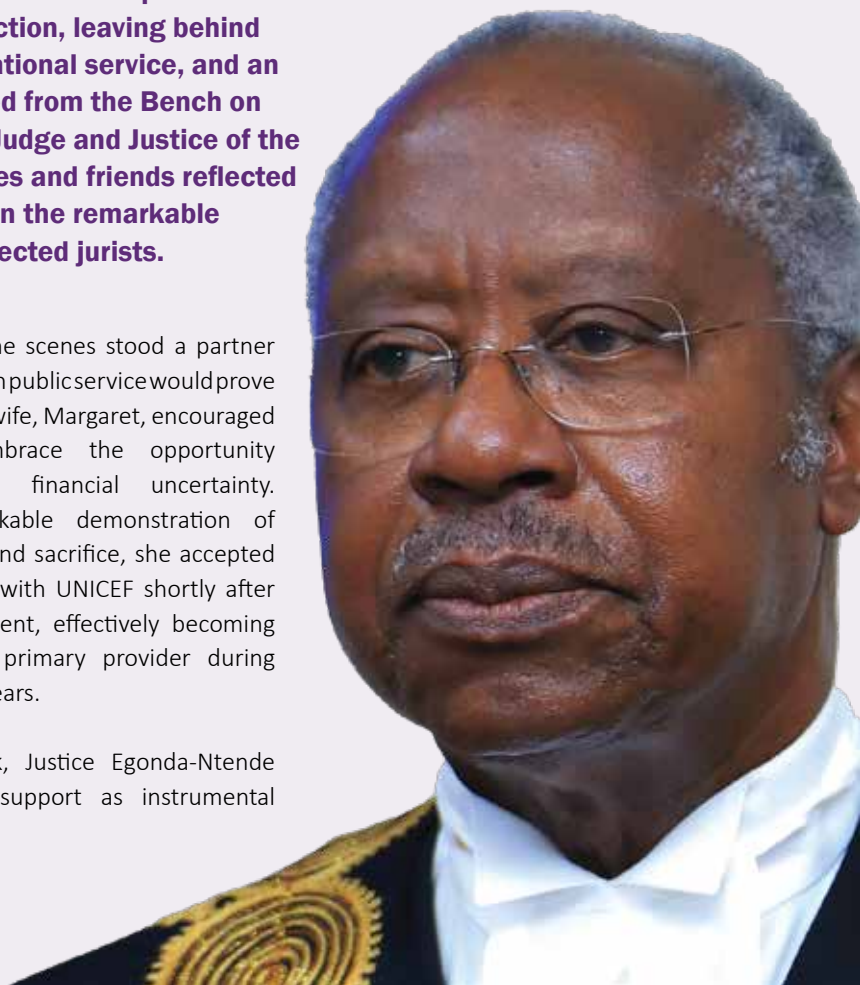
For more than three decades, Justice Frederick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende served the Judiciary with distinction, leaving behind a legacy defined by humility, innovation, international service, and an unwavering commitment to justice. As he retired from the Bench on June 15, 2026 after serving as both a High Court Judge and Justice of the Court of Appeal/Constitutional Court, colleagues and friends reflected not only on his judicial achievements but also on the remarkable journey that shaped one of Uganda's most respected jurists.

A difficult decision that changed a lifetime

When Justice Egonda-Ntende was first offered an appointment to the High Court Bench in 1991, accepting it was far from an easy decision. At the time, he had established a successful and growing legal practice. Joining the Judiciary meant taking a substantial pay cut and stepping into a profession that was then less financially rewarding than private practice. His first instinct was to decline.

Yet behind the scenes stood a partner whose belief in public service would prove decisive. His wife, Margaret, encouraged him to embrace the opportunity despite the financial uncertainty. In a remarkable demonstration of partnership and sacrifice, she accepted employment with UNICEF shortly after his appointment, effectively becoming the family's primary provider during those early years.

Looking back, Justice Egonda-Ntende credits her support as instrumental





Justice Fredrick Egonda-Ntende, who served as Seychelles Chief Justice, during a ceremony to mark the re-opening of the Seychelles Supreme Court in 2007.

in enabling his judicial career. It was a decision that would ultimately shape not only his own future but also contribute significantly to the development of Uganda's Judiciary.

Ahead of his time

Long before digital transformation became a popular phrase in public institutions, Justice Egonda-Ntende was already embracing technology.

He recalls how Margaret introduced their family to computers in the early 1990s after purchasing a used 386 or 486 computer. What began as a household investment soon sparked a lifelong interest in information technology that would later influence the direction of the Judiciary itself.

That early exposure positioned him as one of the institution's strongest advocates for technological innovation. Over the years, he became widely recognised as a champion of digital solutions and modernisation within the justice system.



Reflecting on his career, he likened the Judiciary to a football team where every member plays a position assigned by the manager. For him, success was never about titles or prominence but about faithfully performing whatever role was entrusted to him.

The architect of judicial digital transformation

Justice Egonda-Ntende's passion for technology was reinforced through academic study. He earned a Master of Laws degree in Information Technology and Telecommunications Law from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland, equipping him with specialised expertise at a time when few judicial officers possessed such qualifications.

This unique blend of legal and

technological knowledge would later place him at the forefront of one of the Judiciary's most transformative initiatives; the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS).

Since 2018, he has served as Chairperson of the ECCMIS Steering Committee, guiding the Judiciary through an ambitious transition from paper-based systems to digital case management. Under his stewardship, ECCMIS evolved into a cornerstone of judicial modernisation, enhancing efficiency, transparency, and access to justice.

When user training for the system commenced in 2021, Justice Egonda-Ntende emphasised that technology alone could not guarantee success. Rather, he argued, the effectiveness of any system depended on the people who used it.

His message to judicial officers, systems administrators, clerks, transcribers, and process servers was simple but profound: users must understand not only how the system works but also the role they play in making it successful. That philosophy reflected his broader belief that institutional reform is ultimately about people, not machines.

A jurist with a global footprint

While his contributions at home are significant, Justice Egonda-Ntende's career extended well beyond Uganda's borders.

His expertise earned him opportunities to serve in some of the world's most challenging judicial environments. Between 2000 and 2001, he served as a Judge of the Court of Appeal of East Timor, contributing to the rebuilding



The Vice Chancellor, Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe (Right) confers the Honorary Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa of Makerere University upon Hon. Justice Frederick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende (Left) as the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs), Prof. Umar Kakumba (2nd Right) witnesses on Day 1 of the 74th Graduation Ceremony on January 29, 2024.



Justice Richard Buteera, Deputy Chief Justice Emeritus, Justice Wako Wambuzi, Chief Justice Emeritus joined Justice Egonda-Ntende and his family for thanksgiving prayers after Makerere University awarding him an honorary doctorate.

of legal institutions in a young nation emerging from conflict. He later served with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo from 2002 to 2004, supporting international efforts to strengthen the rule of law. From 2008 to 2009, he reached another career milestone when he served as Chief Justice of Seychelles.

These international assignments broadened his professional perspective while enhancing Uganda's reputation within global judicial circles.

The team player

Despite his accomplishments, Justice Egonda-Ntende often described his judicial philosophy in remarkably modest terms.

Reflecting on his career, he likened the Judiciary to a football team where every member plays a position assigned by the manager. For him, success was never about titles or prominence but about faithfully performing whatever role was entrusted to him.

Whether serving on Uganda's Bench,



Justices Fredrick Egonda-Ntende was honoured with lifetime achievement awards by the Uganda Law Society (ULS) in recognition of his pioneering work in digital transformation and innovative approaches to justice in the country.

working in international missions, or leading major reform initiatives, he viewed each assignment as part of a larger institutional mission.

His willingness to serve wherever needed, and to embrace opportunities beyond Uganda's borders, revealed a professional whose loyalty was to the cause of justice rather than personal recognition.

A legacy beyond the bench

As Justice Egonda-Ntende concludes his judicial service, his legacy manifests in many forms: the thousands of decisions he rendered, the judicial officers he mentored, the international partnerships he fostered, and perhaps most visibly, the digital transformation he helped champion through ECCMIS.

His story is also a reminder that great public service is rarely a solitary endeavour. Behind his distinguished career stood family support, intellectual curiosity, adaptability, and a willingness to embrace change.

For a generation of judicial officers navigating an increasingly digital future, Justice Egonda-Ntende leaves behind a powerful example: that tradition and innovation are not opposing forces, but complementary tools in the pursuit of justice.

His retirement marks the end of an era, but the systems he helped build and the values he embodied will continue shaping the Judiciary for years to come. ●



Court of Appeal honours Justice Egonda-Ntende

On May 14, 2026, The halls of the Court of Appeal were filled with admiration, and reflection as the Judiciary paid tribute to one of its most distinguished jurists, Justice Frederick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende, during a special valedictory sitting and luncheon held in his honour ahead of his retirement.



BY ROSE AMPURIRA
Communications Officer,
The Judiciary

The occasion, held in Courtroom 2 of the Court of Appeal in Kampala and attended both physically and virtually, brought together an impressive gathering of judicial leaders, legal practitioners, government officials, family members, and friends to celebrate a career spanning more than three decades of exemplary service on the Bench.

Presiding over the special sitting was Justice Moses Kawumi Kazibwe, Deputy Chief Justice, alongside a full complement of Justices of the Court of Appeal and Constitutional Court. The proceedings reflected the deep respect Justice Egonda-Ntende has earned throughout his judicial journey and the lasting impact of his contributions to the administration of justice in Uganda and beyond.

The valedictory proceedings were formally initiated through Special Sitting Application No. 1 of 2026, moved by the Solicitor General, Mr. Pius Perry

Biribonwoha, on behalf of the Attorney General. Joining him were senior officials from the Attorney General’s Chambers, including the Deputy Solicitor General, Mr. Charles Ouma, Director of Civil Litigation Mr. Martin Mwambutsya, and Commissioner Richard Adrole.

Members of Uganda’s legal fraternity, including the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr. Lino Anguzu, Senior Counsel Pheona Wall Nabaasa, Senior Counsel John Mary Mugisha, and several distinguished advocates who gathered to pay tribute to a man whose judicial



Cake-cutting moment during a special luncheon held in honour of Justice Fredrick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende (C), alongside his wife, Margaret Egonda-Ntende (R), the Chief Justice, Dr. Flavian Zeija, and Chief Justice Emeritus Justice Samuel Wako Wambuzi (L), together with staff of the Court of Appeal and other guests, at the Court of Appeal in Kampala on May 15, 2026.



Hon. Justice Fredrick Martin Stephen Egonda-Ntende receives tokens of appreciation from the Chief Justice and Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire on behalf of the Court of Appeal (left photo), as well as from his former schoolmates (right photo), at the Court of Appeal in Kampala on May 15, 2026.

career has shaped legal jurisprudence and strengthened the rule of law.

The event attracted an extraordinary cross-section of the justice actors. Among those present were the Chief Justice, Dr. Flavian Zeija; Chief Justice Emeritus Justice Wako Wambuzi; Deputy Chief Justice Emeritus Justice Richard Buteera; the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo; the Chairperson of the Judicial Service Commission, Justice Dr. Douglas Singiza Karekona; and the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana, among others.

Serving and retired Justices of the Supreme Court, Judges of the High Court, Registrars, Magistrates, staff of the Judiciary, representatives from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Attorney General’s Chambers, Uganda Police Force, academia, and advocates in private practice joined family and friends in celebrating a judicial officer whose influence has extended far beyond Uganda’s borders.

“
Reflecting on his career, he likened the Judiciary to a football team where every member plays a position assigned by the manager. For him, success was never about titles or prominence but about faithfully performing whatever role was entrusted to him.”

Justice Egonda-Ntende’s career has been marked by a rare blend of judicial excellence, humility, and innovation. Having joined the Bench as a High Court Judge in 1991, he rose through the ranks to become one of the Judiciary’s most respected appellate judges. Beyond Uganda, he served in several international judicial assignments, including as Chief Justice of Seychelles, a Judge of the Court of Appeal of East Timor, and a judicial officer with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

His passion for modernisation and technology also left an indelible mark on the Judiciary. As Chairperson of the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) Steering Committee, Justice Egonda-Ntende became one of the leading architects of the Judiciary’s digital transformation agenda, championing the adoption of technology to improve efficiency, transparency, and access to justice.

Throughout the proceedings, speakers reflected on his integrity, intellectual rigor, collegiality, and unwavering commitment to public service. Many described him as a mentor, reformer, and statesman whose contributions will continue to influence generations of judicial officers.

Following the special sitting, guests gathered at the Court of Appeal Conference Hall for a luncheon in his honour. The event provided an opportunity for colleagues, friends, and family to celebrate the personal and professional legacy of a man who has devoted much of his life to advancing justice. ●



The Chief Justice, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, launches the Judiciary motorboat JUD1 in Kalangala on March 28, 2026.

How mobile courts, motorboat are taking justice closer to the people

For many years, access to justice in Uganda was often determined by geography. Communities located on remote islands, in hard-to-reach fishing villages, and in distant rural areas, faced significant barriers in accessing court services. Long distances, high transport costs, poor transport networks, and limited legal awareness, frequently stood between citizens and the justice they deserved.

Today, however, the Judiciary is steadily dismantling these barriers through innovative approaches designed to bring justice closer to the people. Among the most impactful of these innovations are the Mobile Courts and the deployment of the Judiciary Motorboat, both of which embody the Judiciary's commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind in accessing justice.

Taking Justice to the People

At the heart of the Judiciary's transformation agenda is the recognition that justice must be accessible to all, regardless of location.

Mobile Courts in Uganda are anchored in the Constitution (Operation of Mobile Courts) (Practice) Directions, 2026

(Legal Notice No. 1 of 2026), issued by the Chief Justice under Article 133(1)(b) of the Constitution and gazetted on 19 March 2026. The directions empower courts to conduct proceedings outside conventional court premises in order to improve access to justice, particularly for remote, underserved, and vulnerable communities.



These were introduced to extend judicial services beyond traditional court premises and into communities where access to justice remains limited. Instead of requiring citizens to travel long distances to court, judicial officers travel to the people, hearing cases, conducting sensitisation activities, and addressing justice needs within the communities themselves.

The initiative has proved particularly valuable in areas where vulnerable populations often face challenges in navigating the justice system. Through Mobile Courts, the Judiciary has been able to reduce delays, address case backlogs, and ensure that justice is delivered in a timely and affordable manner.

These outreach sessions also provide opportunities for public sensitisation on court processes, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), plea bargaining, the Small Claims Procedure, gender-based violence, land rights, family disputes, and other legal issues affecting communities.

The Mobile Courts reflect a fundamental shift in thinking, from expecting citizens to come to court, to taking court services directly to citizens.

Navigating new frontiers through water

While Mobile Courts have successfully expanded the Judiciary’s reach on land, unique geographical challenges remained for island districts and communities situated along Uganda’s lakes and waterways.

To bridge this gap, the Judiciary launched a dedicated motorboat to facilitate access to justice in island and lakeshore communities, particularly those in districts such as Kalangala,



A test drive aboard the JUD1 motorboat following its launch on Lake Victoria on March 28, 2026.

where water transport is often the only means of reaching residents.

Launching the motorboat in Kalangala District, the Chief Justice, Hon. Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, emphasised that access to justice should never be determined by geography.

“Justice must be available to every Ugandan, regardless of where they live. For communities on our islands and along our lakeshores, the challenges of distance and transport should never stand in the way of accessing court services. This motorboat is a practical demonstration of the Judiciary’s commitment to ensuring that justice reaches every citizen.”

The Chief Justice noted that the motorboat forms part of the Judiciary’s broader strategy of improving equitable

access to justice and strengthening public confidence in the institution.

“Our vision is a Judiciary that is responsive, accessible, and people-centred. We are deliberately investing in innovations that bring services closer to the people because justice delayed by distance is justice denied.”

He further observed that the initiative complements ongoing reforms such as mobile courts, mediation, plea bargaining, and digital transformation, all aimed at making justice more accessible and efficient.

The Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana, described the motorboat as a strategic investment in service delivery and inclusion.



“The Judiciary exists to serve all Ugandans, including those living in the most remote and hard-to-reach communities. This motorboat is not merely an asset; it is a bridge connecting our island communities to the justice system.”

Dr. Bigirimana noted that many residents of island communities incur significant costs and spend long hours travelling in pursuit of justice.

“By taking court services closer to the people, we are reducing the cost of accessing justice, improving efficiency, and ensuring that vulnerable communities are not left behind.”

He challenged judicial officers and court staff to maximise the use of the vessel in community outreach, court sessions, legal awareness campaigns, and stakeholder engagements.

“Every journey this boat makes should translate into greater access to justice, increased public awareness, and stronger public trust in the Judiciary. That is the true measure of its success.”

Justice on the water

The Judiciary motorboat has already begun transforming access to justice for island communities.



HW Glory Alleluya, Kalangala Chief Magistrate (standing) sensitising residents of Kachanga Landing Site in Bufumira Sub-county.

One of the earliest beneficiaries has been Kalangala District, where judicial officers have utilised the vessel to reach communities that have historically struggled to access court services.

Recently, officers from Kalangala Chief Magistrate’s Court travelled by Judiciary motorboat to Kachanga Landing Site in Bufumira Sub-county, where they conducted a community outreach programme. Led by Chief Magistrate HW Glory Alleluya, the team sensitised residents on mediation, plea bargaining, the Small Claims Procedure, sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, and illegal fishing.

The outreach demonstrated how the motorboat is enabling the Judiciary to take justice directly to communities that would otherwise remain distant from formal legal services.

More than transportation

The Judiciary motorboat represents far more than a means of transport.

It symbolises the institution’s determination to ensure that justice reaches every corner of the country, including communities separated by water and distance. It demonstrates that access to justice is not merely a constitutional principle but a practical commitment that requires innovation,

investment, and determination.

Similarly, Mobile Courts are more than temporary courtrooms. They represent a people-centred approach to justice that prioritises convenience, accessibility, and responsiveness to community needs.

Together, these innovations are breaking down traditional barriers to justice while fostering greater public trust in the Judiciary.

Advancing the Judiciary’s Strategic Vision

The Mobile Courts Initiative and the Judiciary motorboat are fully aligned with the Judiciary Strategic Plan, which seeks to improve equitable access to justice and enhance service delivery for all court users.

They complement other transformative reforms, including Alternative Dispute Resolution, plea bargaining, expansion of court infrastructure, the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS), and public legal education programmes.

By taking justice beyond court buildings and directly into communities, the Judiciary is creating a more inclusive justice system that responds to the realities faced by ordinary citizens.

A Future of inclusive Justice

As Uganda continues to develop, the demand for accessible, efficient, and responsive justice services will only grow. The Judiciary’s investment in Mobile Courts and specialised transport solutions such as the Judiciary motorboat demonstrates a forward-looking approach that places citizens at the centre of justice delivery. ●



A new era for faster, friendlier justice

For many years, Uganda’s courts have grappled with a growing challenge: a mounting backlog of civil cases that often left litigants waiting years for resolution. Recognising the need for a more efficient and people-centred approach to justice, the Judiciary in March 2026 introduced the Judicature (Court-Annexed Mediation) Rules, 2026, ushering in a new chapter in dispute resolution.

The new framework places mediation at the heart of civil justice delivery, providing parties with an opportunity to resolve disputes amicably, quickly, and cost-effectively without the adversarial nature often associated with courtroom litigation.

A shift from litigation to resolution

Court-annexed mediation is a structured Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process integrated within the court system. Unlike traditional litigation, where a judge determines the outcome after hearing evidence and arguments, mediation encourages parties to work collaboratively toward a mutually acceptable settlement with the guidance of an independent mediator.

The introduction of the 2026 Rules represents a significant overhaul of the earlier 2013 framework. The reforms were motivated by the need to improve efficiency, preserve relationships between disputing parties, and address procedural gaps that had previously hindered the effective implementation of mediation.

Tackling the backlog challenge

One of the most notable features of the new Rules is the requirement that court-annexed mediation proceedings be concluded within two months. This strict timeline is intended to ensure that disputes are resolved promptly, preventing cases from lingering in the justice system and contributing to congestion.

Professionalising Mediation

The new framework places considerable emphasis on quality and accountability. Mediators must now be accredited by the Chief Justice and registered by the Chief Registrar before they can participate in court-annexed mediation.

To qualify, prospective mediators must demonstrate high moral character and proven integrity, reflecting the Judiciary’s commitment to maintaining public confidence in the mediation process.

The Rules also establish clear structures for accreditation, registration, oversight, and administration of mediation services, creating a more standardised and professional system than previously existed.



Justice Moses Kawumi Kazibwe, then Deputy Chief Justice (C), presiding over a mediation session during the Appellate Mediation Fortnight at the Court of Appeal in Kampala on June 1, 2026.



Justice Patricia Kahigi Asimwe presiding over a mediation session during the Commercial Division Mediation Fortnight.



Justice Eva Luswata conducting a mediation session at the Court of Appeal during the Appellate Mediation Fortnight.

Empowering parties to choose peace

A key strength of the new regime is flexibility. Parties to a civil dispute may voluntarily refer their matter to mediation at any stage before final determination by the court. This means that even cases already before a judge can be redirected toward settlement if the parties agree.

The Rules further empower litigants by allowing them to select a mediator of their choice, either from the list of court-accredited mediators or another mutually agreed person. Where parties fail to agree, the Registrar or Magistrate responsible for court-annexed mediation may appoint an accredited mediator to facilitate the process.

The mediator's role

The mediator does not determine who is right or wrong. Instead, the mediator guides discussions, encourages constructive dialogue, and helps parties identify common ground. Their role is to facilitate communication and assist parties in reaching a voluntary settlement.

Confidentiality remains a cornerstone of the process. Before mediation begins, parties are required to sign



Successful mediation does not end with a handshake. Any settlement reached is formally documented in a written agreement and subsequently adopted by the court as a decree or order. This gives the agreement the same legal force and enforceability as a court judgment.

confidentiality and inadmissibility agreements, ensuring that discussions held during mediation cannot later be used against them in court if settlement efforts fail.

Affordable justice

Another important feature of the system is affordability. The Rules stipulate that parties do not pay for court-annexed mediation. Instead, mediators are remunerated by the Judiciary, making the process more accessible to ordinary citizens and reducing financial barriers to justice.

This arrangement not only promotes access to justice but also encourages greater uptake of mediation as an alternative to lengthy court proceedings.

From agreement to enforceable order

Successful mediation does not end with a handshake. Any settlement reached is formally documented in a written agreement and subsequently adopted by the court as a decree or order. This gives the agreement the same legal force and enforceability as a court judgment.

By combining flexibility and cooperation with the authority of the courts, court-annexed mediation offers disputing parties the best of both worlds: a peaceful settlement process backed by legal certainty.

Looking ahead

The introduction of the Judicature (Court-Annexed Mediation) Rules, 2026 signals the Judiciary's determination to modernise justice delivery and place citizens at the centre of dispute resolution. By promoting dialogue over confrontation, reducing delays, and preserving relationships, court-annexed mediation is poised to become a cornerstone of Uganda's justice system. ●



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (centre), hands over the Statutory Instruments, 2026 to Lady Justice Anne Mugenyi (left) and Lady Justice Susan Abinyo (right) during the launch of the Commercial Division Mediation Fortnight in Kampala on 18 May 2026.

How Mediation Fortnights are transforming justice

“A good justice system is not measured merely by the number of judgments delivered, but by the number of disputes resolved, businesses saved and relationships preserved.”



BY **RITAH MUKUNDANE**
Communications Officer,
The Judiciary

For years, mediation within Uganda’s Judiciary was largely perceived as an alternative to conventional litigation; a useful option, but not necessarily the preferred path. However, mediation has emerged as one of the Judiciary’s most effective

tools for delivering timely, affordable and people-centred justice.

The remarkable success recorded by the Family Division and the Commercial Division demonstrates that mediation is no longer an adjunct to adjudication. It has become an integral component of modern judicial administration.

A policy imperative, not an alternative

Launching the Commercial Division Mediation Settlement Fortnight in

May 2026, the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, described mediation as a strategic necessity for the Judiciary.

“For too long, our commercial courts have witnessed a steady rise in the volume and complexity of disputes, particularly those emanating from the banking and financial sector,” she observed.

She noted that unresolved disputes have consequences that extend far beyond the litigants involved.



“Prolonged litigation locks up vital capital that would otherwise support economic growth, strains business relationships, imposes financial and emotional burdens on both borrowers and lenders, and ultimately erodes public confidence in both the financial system and the administration of justice.”

Lady Justice Abodo said the experience of litigants has shown that court victories do not always translate into commercial success.

“Disputes subjected to prolonged litigation often leave parties financially exhausted and dissatisfied, with final court decisions sometimes arriving too late to salvage the underlying commercial interests.”

It is against this backdrop that the Judiciary has deliberately repositioned mediation.

“This is why the Judiciary has elevated Alternative Dispute Resolution from being viewed as an alternative mechanism to becoming a policy imperative and strategic tool for delivering modern, responsive and people-centred justice,” she added.

Healing Families and Preserving Relationships

While the Commercial Division demonstrates mediation’s value to commerce, the Family Division has showcased its immense potential in restoring relationships.

Family disputes often involve emotions, children, inheritance and deeply personal matters that cannot always be satisfactorily resolved through adversarial proceedings.

Through successive Mediation Fortnights, separated spouses have

reached agreements on custody and maintenance, siblings have settled succession disputes, and families have found closure without enduring lengthy trials.

Mediation has offered litigants something that judgments alone cannot provide—the opportunity to listen, understand, reconcile and move forward.

A mediator attached to the Family Division explains:

“Many people come to court seeking vindication, but leave mediation having regained relationships they thought were irretrievably broken. That is the true power of mediation.”

Banking on Dialogue

The Commercial Division’s Settlement Fortnight has perhaps provided the clearest demonstration of mediation’s impact.

Held 18th to 29th May 2026, the exercise targeted disputes arising from

banking, loans and credit transactions.

According to the Head of Division, Lady Justice Anna Mugenyi Bitature, the Court prepared for the exercise for nearly three months.

“We lined up more than 320 cases for mediation and assigned approximately twenty-two mediators to handle them,” she revealed.

The numbers were staggering.

A total of 326 disputes valued at approximately UGX 187.6 billion were cause-listed, involving major financial institutions including Stanbic Bank, Standard Chartered Bank, Equity Bank, Absa Bank, Centenary Bank, DFCU Bank, KCB Bank, Housing Finance Bank, Bank of Africa and several others.

Justice Mugenyi expressed confidence that the Division would attain at least a 50 percent settlement rate, significantly reducing backlog while injecting much-needed liquidity back into Uganda’s economy.

Successful mediation, she observed, does more than just clear court files.

It restores confidence within the banking sector, enables businesses to resume operations, and helps borrowers and lenders find commercially sensible solutions.

Institutional support and new Rules

The transformation of mediation has been accompanied by deliberate institutional reforms.

The Principal Judge unveiled the newly enacted Court-Annexed Mediation Rules, 2026, which introduced a structured 60-day mandatory mediation

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The Principal Judge during an inspection of the mediation registry at Commercial Division.

timeline from the date of referral.

She further announced that accredited court-annexed mediators are now remunerated by the Judiciary, removing a major barrier that previously discouraged parties from embracing mediation.

Most importantly, settlements reached through mediation immediately assume the status of enforceable court orders, providing parties with certainty, finality and legal protection.

Justice Prof. Andrew Khaukha, Executive Director of the Judicial Training Institute, believes these developments signal a new era.

“The Settlement Fortnight builds upon resolutions of the Commercial Court Colloquium organised with the Bank of Uganda, where the Chief Justice directed the Commercial Division to prioritise banking disputes.”

He added that the Judiciary leadership

subsequently convened a Commercial ADR Users’ Roundtable to prepare stakeholders for the exercise.

“We expect more results this time around because the Judiciary leadership has fully supported and guided this process,” Justice Khaukha remarked.

He also commended the teamwork exhibited by judges, registrars and staff of the Commercial Division in organising the fortnight.

Taking mediation to every court

The success stories emerging from the Family and Commercial Divisions have inspired a broader institutional commitment.

It has now been resolved that every High Court Circuit and Division shall conduct at least one Mediation Fortnight every quarter.

The decision marks a significant transition from occasional mediation



It has now been resolved that every High Court Circuit and Division shall conduct at least one Mediation Fortnight every quarter.

drives to a sustained, Judiciary-wide strategy for promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Quarterly mediation fortnights are expected to become platforms for reducing backlog, improving case flow management, lowering the cost of litigation and encouraging litigants to embrace dialogue before embarking on protracted trials.

For businesses, mediation means preserved investments. For families, it means restored relationships. For the Judiciary, it represents a future in which courts do more than decide disputes, they help people find lasting solutions. ●



How Northern Uganda is leading transition from adjudication to reconciliation

By all measures, Northern Uganda presents one of the country's most compelling cases for justice reform. Communities continue to grapple with unresolved land conflicts, family disputes, inheritance wrangles and the lingering effects of decades of conflict. Courts are overstretched, judicial officers are few, and thousands of disputes remain trapped in a cycle of delay.



Yet amid these challenges, the Judiciary is championing an ambitious experiment, one that seeks to restore harmony rather than merely pronounce judgments.

Alternative Justice Systems (AJS), long practised within clans, religious institutions and traditional structures, are increasingly being recognised as indispensable partners in delivering justice that is accessible, affordable and meaningful.

The recent rollout of AJS and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions signals more than a policy initiative. It marks the Judiciary's transition from discussing reform to implementing it.

From policy to practice

At Acholi Inn Hotel in Gulu, the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, presided over a landmark training that together judicial officers, cultural leaders, religious leaders, mediators and advocates from across Acholi.

The engagement was organised by Judicial Training Institute and ADR Registry as part of efforts to operationalise the Judiciary's Alternative Justice Systems Strategy 2023, and the National ADR Policy approved by Cabinet in 2025.

For the Principal Judge, the gathering

represented a decisive turning point. "This engagement is intended to move us from policy and pronouncement to practical implementation," she told participants.

She recalled previous interactions with community leaders who had questioned why discussions on AJS had persisted for years without tangible implementation.



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (R), hands over the Alternative Justice Systems (AJS) Register to Justice Phillip Odoki (L) during an Alternative Justice Systems training held at Acholi Inn, Gulu, on May 4, 2026.



The Judiciary, she said, was now fulfilling its promise. The urgency of the initiative is borne out by statistics. According to findings from the Justice Needs and Satisfaction Survey, Northern Uganda records the highest incidence of legal problems in the country, averaging 4.7 legal disputes per person, coupled with low levels of financial security.

At the time of the training, the Gulu High Court Circuit had 939 pending cases, with land disputes constituting nearly 42 percent of the caseload.

Only two judges and approximately 21 judicial officers serve a population exceeding 1.1 million people. “These realities place an enormous responsibility on those serving as the primary face of the formal justice system in this region,” the Principal Judge observed.

The situation in neighbouring Lango is equally striking. By March 2026, Lira High Court had 2,240 active cases, including 1,123 backlog matters, while criminal cases stood at 984, land matters exceeded 500, and civil disputes were more than 600.

Serving the entire sub-region, with a population of approximately 3.38 million people, are only 20-21 judicial officers. This translates into roughly one judicial officer for every 160,000 people.

For Lady Justice Abodo, the statistics tell an undeniable story. “The formal justice system, operating in isolation, cannot adequately respond to the justice needs of the people in this region. We must therefore act decisively to expand and strengthen complementary mechanisms of justice delivery.”

She noted that courts determine fewer than five percent of disputes, while



The Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, hands over the Alternative Justice Systems (AJS) Register to a cultural leader during an AJS training session at Lira High Court Circuit on May 5, 2026.

more than 85 percent of Ugandans seek justice through community-based mechanisms, including clan structures, elders, religious institutions and Local Council courts.

Justice beyond the colonial courtroom

The Judiciary’s embrace of AJS reflects a broader vision being championed by Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija. Addressing advocates during an ADR training programme in Kampala, the Chief Justice challenged legal practitioners to rethink the role of litigation. “When you embrace ADR, you do not weaken litigation; you strengthen justice. You give citizens choice, certainty, and timely justice.” For Justice Zeija, the benefits extend beyond access to justice.

He believes delays in dispute resolution undermine economic growth and increase borrowing costs, particularly

where commercial disputes remain locked in lengthy litigation. But perhaps his strongest endorsement was reserved for AJS.

“We must break from the colonial model of justice. A mutual resolution brokered by respected community leaders often carries more social legitimacy than a court order.”

He pointed to ongoing reconciliation initiatives in Acholi, Lango and Karamoja, where cultural and religious leaders are already helping communities resolve disputes that might otherwise remain before courts for years. “Justice should not only be accessible; it must be understood, accepted and owned by the communities it serves.”

Courts and communities as partners

Throughout the trainings in Gulu and



Lira, the Principal Judge repeatedly emphasised that AJS is not intended to replace formal courts. Rather, it seeks to complement them.

Rooted in traditional and community-based mechanisms, AJS promotes reconciliation, restoration of relationships and social harmony. It is particularly suited for disputes involving land, inheritance, family relations and minor civil disagreements, matters that dominate court dockets and often involve parties who must continue living together after the dispute is resolved.

Anchoring her remarks in the Constitution, Lady Justice Abodo cited Article 126(2)(d) and (e), which obliges courts to promote reconciliation and administer substantive justice without undue regard to procedural technicalities.

She outlined a framework through which judicial officers would identify suitable cases, explain available options to parties and make referrals to community justice mechanisms.

Participation, she emphasised, must always remain voluntary. Safeguards must protect vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, while standardised referral forms, registers and documentation systems would ensure accountability and transparency. “These systems must complement rather than compete with each other in achieving timely, fair and restorative justice,” she stressed.

The cultural dimension of justice

One of the most striking aspects of the Lira training was the active participation of cultural institutions.

Opening the session, the Principal Judge welcomed the Won Nyaci me Lango, Dr. Eng. Moses Michael Odongo Okune, the leadership of Tekwaro Lango, the Council of Owitong, and clan leaders, describing them as true and equal partners in the administration of justice.

The Paramount Chief reflected on Northern Uganda’s post-conflict history and observed that while formal justice remains essential, sustainable peace demands reconciliation and healing at the community level.

Traditional justice systems, he said, remain popular because they are accessible, affordable and culturally legitimate. “They do not create winners and losers. They restore relationships and produce lasting peace.”

He nevertheless cautioned that cultural structures require training, guidelines and safeguards to prevent abuse, corruption and practices inconsistent with constitutional values.

A different measure of success

The Principal Judge believes the success of AJS and ADR will depend largely on judicial officers, registrars and

magistrates. They must identify suitable cases, sensitise court users and facilitate referrals.

She warned against over-formalising community justice systems in ways that could undermine their flexibility and responsiveness. At the close of the Gulu training, participants received operational tools including AJS practitioner registers, institutional registers and court referral registers to support implementation.

The message emerging from both Gulu and Lira was unmistakable. The Judiciary is no longer merely talking about AJS.

It is building a justice system in which judges, magistrates, advocates, elders, religious leaders and cultural institutions work together to resolve disputes, preserve relationships and restore communities.

For Chief Justice Zeija and Principal Judge Abodo, the promise of AJS lies not in replacing courts, but in ensuring that justice is experienced as something more profound than a judgment, it is a process through which communities heal, reconcile and move forward together. ●



Throughout the trainings in Gulu and Lira, the Principal Judge repeatedly emphasized that AJS is not intended to replace formal courts. Rather, it seeks to complement them.





The Judiciary Client Charter: Putting court users at the heart of justice

In an era where citizens increasingly demand transparency, accountability and efficient public services, the Judiciary of Uganda has taken a bold step to redefine its relationship with the public through Judiciary Client Charter. Unveiled by Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, early this year, the Charter is a public pledge that sets out the standards court users should expect from the Judiciary and the responsibilities they bear as consumers of justice.

More than a policy document, the Charter is a social contract between the Judiciary and the people of Uganda. It seeks to ensure that every person who walks through the doors of a court receives services that are timely, accessible, transparent, professional and fair.

A Judiciary focused on service

Launching the Charter, Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija described it as a significant milestone in the Judiciary’s transformation journey and a practical demonstration of its commitment to citizen-centred justice.

“The Judiciary exists to serve the people. This Charter clearly defines what court users should expect from us and what we expect from them. It is a commitment to accountability, transparency and quality service delivery.”

The Chief Justice noted that justice must not only be delivered but must also be experienced positively by those who seek it. He emphasised that public confidence in the Judiciary depends not only on judicial decisions but also on the quality of interaction citizens have with court staff and judicial officers.

“Every court user deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. Our goal is to ensure that courts remain places where people find solutions,



The Chief Justice of Uganda, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, at launch of the Judiciary Client Charter during the biweekly health aerobics session at the Judiciary Headquarters, Kampala, on January 28, 2026.

protection of their rights and confidence in the rule of law.”

Defining standards, strengthening accountability

The Charter outlines the Judiciary’s commitment to providing justice irrespective of social or economic status,

ensuring timely and accessible services, maintaining high professional standards, communicating clearly with court users and enforcing a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption.

It also provides mechanisms through which citizens can lodge complaints, seek redress and participate in improving service delivery across the justice system.



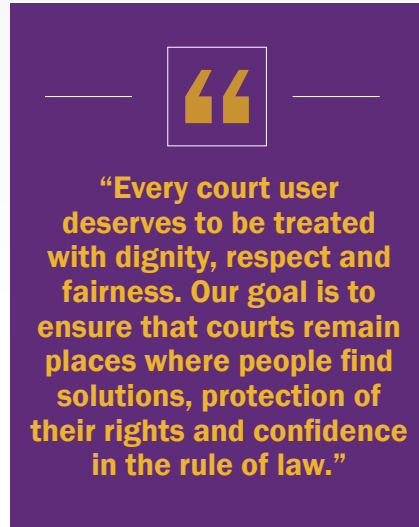
The Charter complements broader reforms aimed at improving access to justice and strengthening public trust in the courts.

“A modern Judiciary must be responsive to the needs of the people. This Charter gives the public a voice and provides measurable standards against which our performance can be assessed.”

A plus for improved service delivery

The launch was welcomed by the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana, who described the Charter as a critical instrument for improving public service delivery within the justice sector.

“Citizens deserve services that are efficient, transparent and accountable. The Judiciary Client Charter is an important step towards ensuring that court users know their rights, understand the services available to them and can hold institutions accountable for the quality of those services.”



He observed that public institutions perform best when expectations are clearly defined and performance standards are openly communicated.

“The future of public service lies in responsiveness and accountability. Documents such as this Charter strengthen trust between institutions and the people they serve.”

Building trust through service

At its core, the Judiciary Client Charter seeks to transform the culture of service delivery within the courts. It promises fairness, professionalism, confidentiality, integrity and respect while ensuring that information is shared promptly through official channels, outreach programmes, media engagements and Court Open Days.

The Charter also reinforces the Judiciary’s commitment to the constitutional principles that justice shall not be delayed, that all persons are equal before the law, and that courts must remain accessible to every Ugandan.

As the Judiciary continues to implement reforms under the leadership of Chief Justice Dr. Flavien Zeija, the Client Charter stands as a visible reminder that justice is about service, accountability and public confidence. ●




There are ongoing efforts to popularise the Client Charter at different courts.



Chief Justice, Hon. Dr. Flavian Zeija and the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, engaging with court users during a Court Open Day at Soroti High Court Circuit on March 3, 2026.


How Courts are reconnecting with communities across Uganda through Court Open Days

Across town centres, radio airwaves and courthouse grounds, a transformation is unfolding in how Ugandans experience justice. From Wobulenzi to Kitgum, Ntungamo to Bushenyi and Dokolo, the Judiciary’s Court Open Days are bringing justice out of closed chambers and into direct conversation with the people it serves.



BY ROSE NAMANYA
Communications Officer,
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The Judiciary has intensified a nationwide public engagement campaign anchored on Court Open Days and amplified through strategic radio mobilisation. The objective, simple yet powerful: demystify court processes,

strengthen accountability, promote access to justice, and rebuild public confidence through direct dialogue.

Taking justice to the airwaves

Before court grounds filled with citizens, the message first travelled through community radio stations — the heartbeat of local information. Live programmes aired on popular radio stations with intent to reach the wider public.

Judicial officers and communications teams used these platforms to explain what Court Open Days are, the services that citizens could access, how Alternative Dispute Resolution works,

and why public participation matters in strengthening accountability. Call-in segments allowed listeners to ask candid questions about bail, court fees, timelines, complaints handling and court innovations. By the time, Open Days arrived, communities were informed, curious and ready to engage.

Courts open their doors

At Wobulenzi Magistrate’s Court, residents engaged directly with judicial leadership, explored exhibition stalls, and learned how court processes work in practice. The presence of local leaders, prosecutors and religious figures reinforced the message that justice is a collective responsibility.



In Soroti, the Chief Justice, Dr. Flavian Zeija, presided over the Open Day, inspecting facilities, interacting with stakeholders and holding closed-door engagements with judicial officers to strengthen operational accountability. District leaders, security agencies and justice sector partners turned the Open Day into a multi-sector platform for improving service delivery.

Bushenyi and Ntungamo added colour and visibility through a public procession that wound through town, symbolising justice moving closer to the people. Citizens interacted with courts in an open, welcoming atmosphere that blended education, accountability and community pride.

In Dokolo, the Open Day carried special significance as the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, presided over her first Open Day. Her message was clear: justice must be predictable, people-centred and accountable. She outlined reforms in staffing, technology, court expansion and decentralisation,

including the rollout of electronic case management systems and the establishment of regional Court of Appeal circuits. She also emphasised that accountability does not rest with judicial officers alone, communities must actively participate, speak out and uphold lawful conduct.

Kitgum echoed these themes as the Principal Judge reaffirmed the Judiciary's zero tolerance for corruption and the



Court users interact with staff of the Inspectorate of Courts during the 2nd National Court Open Day at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, Kampala, on December 12, 2025.



A group photo to commemorate Kitgum High Court's first Court Open Day at the Court's Grounds on November 26, 2025.

importance of integrity in sustaining public trust. The Resident Judge shared candid backlog statistics and progress in ICT integration, while district leaders highlighted the donation of land for a permanent High Court facility, a tangible sign of partnership between the Judiciary and local government.

Listening to the people

Across all regions, citizens used the Open Days to raise practical concerns, from infrastructure gaps and internet connectivity to bail processes, court fees, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and the need for more Alternative Justice training at community level. These conversations provided valuable feedback that will inform service improvements, infrastructure planning and operational reforms.

The Open Days were not only about formal dialogue. Cultural performances, security force demonstrations and community exhibitions created an inclusive environment that attracted families, youth and local leaders, reinforcing the Judiciary's human face.

More than events, a culture shift

What emerged from Quarter II was more than a series of events. It was a visible shift in how justice engages with citizens, transparent, approachable and responsive. Radio mobilisation ensured no community was left behind. Leadership presence reinforced credibility. Community participation transformed courts into shared civic spaces rather than distant institutions.

As Uganda continues its transformation under the Administration of Justice Programme and the National Development Plan IV, Court Open Days are proving to be powerful bridges between policy and people. ●



Experiences of reconciliation in my judicial journey - Lady Justice Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya

In January 2000, I was posted to the Chief Magistrate’s Court of Mubende as a Magistrate Grade I. My Chief Magistrate was a single mother of school-going children who suffered frequent bouts of ill health. In addition to her responsibility at Mubende, she was assigned the duty to circuit at the Mityana Magistrate’s Court. On one of the days at Mityana, she was arrested by the IGG on a bribe-taking allegation and detained at Jinja Road Police Station.

Shocked and very scared, I visited her in detention. I found her in a uniport, (isolated from the other detainees because of her position), and when she caught a glimpse of me, she started to hit her head against the wall, crying and incoherent. It was a devastating sight. The visit ended there.

Over the course of several years, the law, both criminal and administrative, took its course. She was interdicted, and eventually tried by the Judicial Service Commission, which exercised its discretion and demoted her. She resumed her duties and retired when the time came.

It was mildly apparent, to the keen observer, that the cloud of her past experience hovered over her latter career years, in some ways. More importantly, however, was that the dignity of being given the opportunity to continue to serve, allowed her to provide for her family and meet

her own medical expenses. And that blessing of a second chance, I believe allowed her to exit the Judiciary Service reconciled with her employer of many decades.

The Chief Magistrate Court of Buganda Road Court and the Chambers of the Deputy Chief Justice Laetitia Mukasa Kikonyogo (RIP)

Five years after joining the Judiciary Service, I was promoted to Senior Magistrate Grade I in 2005. Three years later, 20 or more positions for Chief Magistrate became available and together with my colleagues who were eligible, I applied for the

position. To my anguish and grave disappointment, I was not successful in my bid.

The setback saw me question everything about my abilities, competence and, yes - the selection process. All this conflict happened mostly in my mind and heart. The battle raged on for quite a while. Having spent a total of six years at the Chief Magistrate’s Court at Buganda Road, I was in danger of suffering apathy at my work since the judicial work had become repetitive and predictable.

Relief came from the Chief Registrar and a posting to the Chambers of the Deputy Chief Justice, Hon. Lady Justice Laetitia Eulalia Mukasa Kikonyogo, as her Personal Assistant. It was an assignment with an eclectic portfolio. And the common perception of the role was that it was unattractive and undesirable since the office bearer was required on a 24hr basis to carry out a myriad of non-judicial duties for the Principal.

In the beginning, it appeared that way but after my 15 months tour of duty, I can state that it was a necessary mentorship opportunity, peppered with unique exposure to a bird’s eye view of the Judiciary as seen from the lenses of the Deputy Chief Justice. I learned speech writing and gained a deep understanding





Buganda Road Court.



Induction Training for Magistrates Grade I at Uganda Management Institute- 2000.



Deputy Chief Justice Emeritus, Laetitia Mukasa Kikonyogo (RIP)

of how government protocol works. I observed how the Deputy Chief Justice’s passion for justice extended outside the courtroom to the community around her. She entertained after-work visits from community members in the vicinity in which she lived, who needed guidance on the law but could not afford legal fees. And she also gently nudged me in the direction of respectable apparel for the female judicial officer. If I fell short of expectations, which was not as infrequent as I hoped, she never once raised her voice at me. Her gentleness was disarming. So much authority. So much gentleness.

The greatest lesson, in hindsight, was



In conclusion, reconciliation is hard work, requiring a lot of sacrifice, but in my experience, it has infinite rewards, both tangible and intangible.

her care and concern for her support staff. She constantly and consistently followed up on their welfare. *“Abaana balidde?” “Abaana bafuunye esente zaabwe?”* (Have the children eaten? Have the children been paid their allowances?). My legalism struggled with embracing the notion that the grown men who included her drivers and security detail were “children”! In my seven-year career experience, there was significant demonstrated duplicity amongst non-judicial officers, which compelled me to keep them at arm’s length. It became clear that not only was I required to change my mindset, I was personally responsible for ensuring their welfare needs were met.

It is impossible to champion any cause without being concerned about those whose cause one is championing. A bond formed with these gentlemen which remains to this day.

I applaud the Deputy Chief Justice Laetitia Mukasa Kikonyogo (RIP) for many things, but most of all for reconciling me with non-judicial officers by modelling equity in her dealings with them.

Chief Magistrate’s Court of Hoima

Early 2010 saw me appointed as Chief Magistrate, Hoima. The magisterial area included Kibaale and Kagadi Districts. Once in a while, I was also assigned duties at the Kiboga Court. During that whole time, my faithful driver Mr. Ephraim Kaheru (RIP) carried the burden of driving me around.

November 2011, brought our third bundle of joy, Daniella Mukwaya (the tall one). After completing my maternity leave; I commuted with baby from Kampala, where my family lived and Hoima, my work station.

On one of these journeys, we faced one of the most traumatic experiences of my life when an unescorted five-year-old school girl dashed into the middle of



the highway, right into our path. Efforts to brake and avoid her were futile and she lost her young life.

We drove, very shakily, to Kiboga Police Station where the late Kaheru reported the tragic incident. After all the preliminary post-accident steps were concluded, a process that took about four hours, we headed to Hoima.

The family of the victim was contacted by the Police and the late Kaheru was encouraged to seek reconciliation with them. A few meetings later, compensation was agreed upon and the accident file closed.

A few years ago, the late Kaheru passed on after an illness. I am grateful that in spite of the horror of that accident, he was able to rest in the knowledge that the little angel's family had made peace with him and the event that took her from them.

Chief Magistrate's Court Buganda Road

In 2013-2014, I returned to the Buganda Road Court as Chief Magistrate. The promotion carried with it the accompanying jurisdiction to handle criminal matters with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Rampant offences under this bracket were forgeries of land titles and related offences.

One fine day after handling pleas and hearings, I was seated in my Chambers. The door was open, so I had a clear view of the road leading to the parking yard where the prison bus exited. Looking outside in that posture judicial officers are familiar with, I observed the prison bus slope down towards the exit gate. As it stopped to allow the security guard to open, one of the inmates, looked at me through the barriers of bus window



The Late Ephraim Kaheru (Hoima Experiences)

and wagged his finger at me in warning. Immediately after that, the bus drove away. My emotional responses included fright, anger and indignation. I tried to follow up with the prisons authorities who the inmate was, but I was not successful.

Considering the number of cases I was handing at the time, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

In the course of time, I gave up the search and I reconciled myself once again with the precarious nature of judicial work and the negative emotions it draws from those who receive our services. I am grateful that violent attacks on members of the Ugandan Legal Fraternity have been kept at a minimum. My hope always is that we shall all be safe and protected as we carry out our judicial roles.

The three roles, I assumed thereafter, were administrative roles at the Inspectorate of Courts, the Registry of Planning and Development and the Commission of Inquiry into Land Matters. All were fast paced assignments which required alertness, continuous learning and team dynamics management. During that time, I

reconciled myself with the need for hard work, flexibility, resilience and a people-centred approach while executing non-judicial duties.

Judge, High Court of Uganda

In March 2018, I was appointed Judge of the High Court, alongside my cohort of 10, including Judge Paul Gadenya Wolimbwa, Judge Alex Mackay Ajiji, Lady Justice Cornelia K. Sabiiti (Justice of Appeal), Judge Tadeo Asimwe (President, UJOA, Emeritus), Principal Judge Jane Frances Abodo, Justice Musa Ssekaana, (Justice of Appeal), Judge Richard Wejuli Wabwire (Deputy Principal Judge- EACJ), Judge Joyce Kavuma Kyambadde (Head, Civil Division) and Judge Emmanuel Baguma (Deputy Head, Criminal Division). By general consensus, I was appointed Chief Whip of this esteemed group of very special people. Attempts to remove me, have thus far, been gently thwarted.

I have benefited greatly from the friendship, loyalty, camaraderie, constructive feedback, and extensive laughter moments with these colleagues who have contributed deeply to my wellbeing over the last eight years. On the occasions where I am conflicted and confused, they will offer a place of refuge where my anxieties are settled, my emotions are reconciled and peace prevails. They are my Judicial Oasis.

UJOA Presidency

Two years ago, on the May 4, 2024, I was elected President, Uganda Judicial Officers' Association.

The mantle of presidency was passed on to me from Hon. Justice Tadeo Asimwe, the first member of the Higher Bench to hold the position in the Association's 50-year history.



For the benefit of readers who joined the Judiciary after serving in other Institutions, UJOA was initially a magistrates' only association, when established in 1970. Its primary objective was to promote the welfare of Magistrates. One key milestone, is that UJOA, through a painstaking legal process, successfully argued against taxation of lower-bench judicial officers' salaries.

For decades, UJOA's relationship with the Judiciary Service's leadership was symbiotic. Salaries of all lower-bench judicial officers were subjected to monthly deductions to generate revenue for running the Association's activities. This practice ensured that all lower-bench judicial officers became members of UJOA upon joining the Judiciary Service. Judges and Justices, on the other hand, have always become members by voluntary annual subscription. Inevitably, there was always an imbalance of representation in the Association, with 100% of Magistrates and Registrars on board and only a handful of Justices and Judges voluntarily associated.

Several years ago, in what can only be described as the most unpleasant season in UJOA history, tensions, differences of opinion and hostility broke out between UJOA and Judiciary Service leadership. The trouble escalated into a lawsuit, which severely ruined what little was left of the once amiable relationship. As during all situations of conflict, factions arose and words were deployed liberally as "weapons of mass destruction" for purposes of character assassination of perceived opponents. Again, as with all conflict, there was retaliation and collateral damage. UJOA lost its financial stability as the Judiciary withdrew — from their relationship.



High Court Judges Cohort of 2018.



In conclusion, reconciliation is hard work, requiring a lot of sacrifice, but in my experience, it has infinite rewards, both tangible and intangible.

Deduction of salaries at source was terminated and the UJOA van was withdrawn leaving UJOA broke and immobile.

Personally, I was uncomfortable but I watched the unpleasantness from the safety of my ventilator. Perched high up, sufficient oxygen to breathe, my opinions remaining private and safe from public judgments.

You can imagine my surprise when I was invited by my senior brother and friend, Justice John Eudes Keitirima (former UJOA President) to consider representing the Judges of the High

Court on the UJOA Executive. It took some convincing, but eventually, I agreed with the suggestion and joined UJOA leadership in February 2020, under the first Judge-led President of the Association. It was a four-year arduous journey marked by sincere efforts to mend two fragmented relationships; between Judiciary leadership and UJOA and between the Upper Bench and Lower Bench (the election of the first Judge President was, in some spheres, viewed as an attempt to silence the lower bench). I highly commend Judge Tadeo Asimwe for his stamina and tenacity during this period.

When I completed my four years as UJOA Judge of the High Court Representative, I looked forward to stepping down and returning to the predictability of Judicial duties.

As God would have it, His plan prevailed and I gingerly run for President, UJOA. I was very relieved when I was elected unopposed on May 4, 2024.

Our 15-member Executive crafted our two-year workplan on three pillars; Professional Excellence, Unity and Compassion.



Lady Justice Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya presents a plaque to the Principal Judge, Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo, formally welcoming her to the office during the UJOA Dinner held at the Supreme Court Conference Hall, Kampala, on November 21, 2025.

The Unity Pillar was inspired by the prevailing divisions between career judicial officers and those joining the Judiciary Service from other sections of the Legal Fraternity, the chasm between the higher and lower bench; and distance between judicial and non-judicial officers. Our activities are designed to “lift the veil of separation”, to look beyond positions and pasts by providing platforms to foster unity amongst us.

To that end, we celebrated the inaugural International Day of Judicial Wellbeing, on Friday the July 25, 2025 as an event which brought together all categories of Judicial Staff for a day of wellness.

Secondly, in conjunction with the International Association of Women Judges- Uganda Chapter, we introduced the Leadership Dialogue, an all-inclusive event, to help us all reflect on our respective leadership journeys and experiences.

I remember him for his notable height, perfect posture and regal presence. He was very polite and unhurried in his speech.



Uganda Judicial Officers Association (UJOA) leadership team with then Chief Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny-Dollo, and UJOA President Lady Justice Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya (left of the Chief Justice) at a ceremony held at Hotel Africana Kampala, on June 4, 2025.



Justice Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya, President of UJOA (L), with Chief Magistrate Timothy Lumunye of LDC Court under Buganda Road Chief Magistrates' Area (R), during the launch of the Porridge Project at LDC Court in Kampala on November 27, 2025.

When writing one of my decisions at the Land Division, I scanned ULII for a precedent to support the position I took to strike out a plaint.

It was on grounds that the Plaintiffs, who were administrators of an estate, had not filed the mandatory inventory under the Succession Act and were seeking to recover land before taking that legal step. My search ended when I found his decision in the Supreme

Court case of *Sebalamu v Nalwoga* <https://ulii.org/en/akn/ug/judgment/ugsc/2018/54/eng@2018-12-17>. One of his last contributions to case law in Uganda, I believe.

Outside his legacy in the Court Room, he was a faithful member of UJOA and a successful Court Accredited Mediator at the Family Division of the High Court. The Hon. Chief Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, led a few of us, who attended the Bank of Uganda Judicial Officers' Colloquium, at Lake Victoria Serena Golf Resort & Spa in a moment of silence to remember his great service to the people of Uganda.

As I mused over his astonishing career rise from Clerical Officer to Supreme Court Justice to Extraordinary Mediator, I am persuaded that his most satisfying time must have been as a peace maker, fostering reconciliation between family members in his evening years.

In conclusion, reconciliation is hard work, requiring a lot of sacrifice, but in my experience, it has infinite rewards, both tangible and intangible. ●

PICTORIAL



A cross-section of judicial officers pose for a group photograph with the Vice President of Uganda, H.E. Jessica Alupo (C), during the opening of the 27th Annual Judges' Conference at Speke Resort Munyonyo on February 2, 2026.



The hearing of the Presidential Election Petition at the Supreme Court in Kampala on February 26, 2026.








THE JUDICIARY

JUDICIARY CLIENT CHARTER: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

YOUR RIGHTS AS A CLIENT

- 1**  **RIGHT TO INFORMATION:** Access information upon application.
- 2**  **RIGHT TO IDENTITY:** You have a right to know the identity of the staff member serving you.
- 3**  **RIGHT TO A HEARING:** A fair, speedy, and public hearing.
- 4**  **RIGHT TO FEEDBACK:** Lodge complaints and receive timely responses.
- 5**  **RIGHT TO DOCUMENTS:** Receive certified court documents and judgments upon payment of fees.

SERVICE STANDARDS & TIMELINES

- 1**  **PUNCTUALITY:** Report on time to attend to your court matter(s).
- 2**  **COURTROOM ETIQUETTE:** Observe orderliness and refrain from using offensive language or gestures.
- 3**  **ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** Keep phones and other devices off or in silent mode during Court proceedings.
- 4**  **DECENCY:** Dress decently; avoid outfits with offensive writings or signs.
- 5**  **ZERO TOLERANCE:** Refrain from engaging in corruption and report any unprofessional conduct.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A CLIENT

- 1**  **JUDGMENTS:** Court decisions shall be delivered within 60 days after the close of a hearing.
- 2**  **BAIL RULINGS:** Delivered within 30 days.
- 3**  **BAIL REFUNDS:** Processed within 21 working days from the date of submission.
- 4**  **CORRESPONDENCE:** Responses to received letters will be provided within 14 working days.

ESSENTIAL FREE SERVICES

- 1**  Fixing of hearing dates.
- 2**  Mediation by a Court-accredited mediator.
- 3**  Processing of bail refund and security deposit funds.
- 4**  A copy of the Judgment.
- 5**  Handling administrative and criminal matters.

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