

SPEECH

BY

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AT

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Your Lordship the Hon. Chief Justice;
Hon. Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs;
Your Lordship the Honourable Principal Judge;
Justices and Judges of Courts of Judicature;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am pleased to join you once again at the opening of this Annual Judges' Conference. I extend my warm greetings to all Judicial Officers gathered here and to our distinguished guests from within and beyond our borders. I congratulate the Judiciary for convening this 27th Conference and for sustaining this important tradition of reflection, accountability and renewal. I thank the Chief Justice for the invitation and for the continued leadership of the Judiciary in service of our people.

Our NRM Manifesto is anchored on building a stable, disciplined and productive society governed by strong and effective institutions. Under National Development Plan V, Government has prioritised human capital development, public sector efficiency, and institutional performance as key drivers of socio-economic transformation. The Judiciary is central to this agenda.

It is in that context that the theme you have chosen; "Judicial Wellness: A Tool for Effective Case Management" becomes particularly relevant. Judicial wellness is therefore not a peripheral

concern; it is a strategic governance issue. A healthy, organised and well-led Judiciary is a productive Judiciary; one that clears cases faster, manages pressure better and delivers predictable justice. It is both timely and strategic. Our 1995 Constitution is clear. Judicial power is derived from the people and must be exercised in their name, in accordance with their values and for their benefit. Justice must therefore be accessible, timely, impartial and respectful. However, this constitutional promise cannot be fully realized if those who administer justice are overwhelmed, exhausted, or unsupported.

I wish to remind you that effective justice systems lie at the very heart of every democratic country. There is no country that can be stable, prosperous, or sovereign without an effective system of justice. When we took responsibility for leadership in 1986, Uganda had suffered institutional breakdown, impunity and disorder and due to this breakdown, the country was suffering from high levels of lawlessness and high handedness. One of our central tasks was to restore authority, discipline, and respect for the law.

That work must be sustained! Our people should experience justice not in legal theory, but in time taken to resolve disputes, the cost involved, and the certainty of outcomes. When cases delay, citizens lose confidence, investors hesitate, and social tensions rise. Justice delayed is therefore justice denied. That is why I have consistently

emphasised speed, efficiency, and discipline across all state institutions — including the Judiciary.

Let us be honest. Backlogs are not caused by laws alone. They arise from systems, organisation, leadership, and human capacity. Judges are human beings. They carry heavy workloads, face public pressure, and handle emotionally demanding matters. If that pressure is not well managed, it affects output. Fatigue leads to delay; delay leads to dissatisfaction; dissatisfaction leads to instability, so to say the strength of our justice system ultimately depends on the physical, mental, and ethical wellbeing of those entrusted with judicial power.

Let me reiterate Government's position clearly: a strong, independent, and efficient Judiciary is indispensable to democracy, peace, and national development. It underpins investor confidence, protects rights, resolves disputes, and maintains social order. This is why we continue to support judicial infrastructure expansion, staffing, training, and institutional reform — even as we demand discipline, integrity, and accountability.

I wish to speak about three interconnected concepts: the Africanisation of justice, the judiciary as an enabler of wealth creation, and the central theme of judicial wellness. These are not separate ideas, but different facets of the same goal: a justice

system that is rooted in our context, responsive to our people, and conducive to our prosperity.

First, the Africanisation of justice means grounding our legal processes in the realities, values, and wisdom of African societies. It means recognizing that justice is not only delivered in courtrooms but also through community reconciliation, restorative practices, and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. Our Constitution itself acknowledges this by providing for traditional and cultural leaders in the administration of justice. The promotion of Alternative Justice Systems (AJS) is not a step backward; it is a step inward towards a justice system that is more accessible, more understandable, and more meaningful to the ordinary Ugandan. When our people see themselves in the justice system, they trust it more. And a trusted judiciary is a strong judiciary.

Second, the judiciary as an enabler of wealth creation. This is a critical but often overlooked function of the courts. Wealth is created in an environment where property rights are secure, contracts are enforced, commercial disputes are resolved swiftly, and innovation is protected. Delayed justice in a land dispute can stall a farming cooperative for years. A backlog in the Commercial Court can cause a small business to collapse. A slow appeal can deter a foreign investor. Therefore, every judgment you write, every case you manage, every backlog you clear, is not just an act of law, it is an act of economic enablement. You are the guardians of the

legal predictability that allows Ugandans to plan, invest, build, and prosper. By efficiently adjudicating cases especially commercial, land, and intellectual property matters you directly contribute to capital formation, job creation, and national income growth.

Let us connect this to judicial wellness. An overburdened, stressed, and fatigued judge cannot effectively Africanise justice or enable wealth creation. How can a judge thoughtfully apply principles of restorative justice if they are managing 500 files? How can a judge write a clear, precedent-setting commercial ruling under cognitive exhaustion? The strain you face, rising early, sitting for long hours, facing confrontation and carrying the vicarious trauma of those you serve directly impacts the quality, speed, and innovation of your work.

But investment must produce results.

Technology must reduce delays, not create new excuses. ADR must decongest courts, not remain a side activity. Leadership at court stations must enforce standards, timelines, and discipline. Judicial independence does not mean absence of accountability.

I am encouraged that this Conference will address ADR and Alternative Justice Systems, case management in complex matters, sentencing consistency, technology, and judicial leadership. These are practical tools for improving performance and restoring public confidence. On ADR and Alternative Justice Systems, let me be clear. Uganda has long traditions of resolving disputes through

dialogue and reconciliation. Courts should not be the first stop for every dispute. Judges must actively manage cases and guide parties toward appropriate resolution mechanisms. This reduces pressure on the Judiciary and allows courts to focus on serious and complex matters.

Furthermore, an efficient judiciary ensures that government programs are not unnecessarily delayed by litigation. It fosters a culture of patriotism by demonstrating that state institutions work with integrity and speed for the benefit of the people.

Before I conclude, I wish to acknowledge the leadership of the Judiciary during this period of transition. I commend the retiring Chief Justice for his dedicated service to the nation and for the reforms undertaken during his tenure. In particular, the deliberate re-engineering of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Alternative Justice Systems that laid a firm institutional foundation for mediation, reconciliation, and community-based justice. These reforms strengthened access to justice, reduced pressure on formal courts, and advanced the Africanisation of justice by promoting approaches that are restorative, practical, and rooted in our values and traditions. This contribution has provided a coordinated framework for positioning ADR as a central pillar of justice delivery.

I also wish to congratulate His Lordship, the Chief Justice, Hon. Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, upon assuming this important

responsibility. As the Judiciary enters this new phase, it is expected to consolidate existing reforms, strengthen efficiency and integrity, and enhance public confidence in the administration of justice. I trust that under this leadership, the Judiciary will continue to align its work with national development priorities and play its role in the transformation of Uganda.

As you deliberate during this Conference, I urge you to focus on practical solutions that reduce backlog, improve turnaround time, and strengthen public confidence. Every completed land, commercial, and criminal disputes enhances the economic development of the country. The wananchi are watching. They want results.

I thank you for your service and commitment to the country. It is now my honour to declare the 27th Annual Judges' Conference officially open.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.