

**SPEECH BY H.E GEN YOWERI KAGUTA MUSEVENI AT THE
OPENING OF THE NATIONAL LEGAL AID CONFERENCE 2015;
COMMON WEALTH RESORT MUNYONYO**

Your Lordship the Chief Justice

Your Lordship the Deputy Chief Justice

Your Lordship the Principal Judge

Honourable Ministers

Your Lordships

Your Excellencies

Heads of Justice Law and Order Sector Institutions

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I salute the Justice Law and Order Sector for spearheading efforts to have a comprehensive legal aid regime in Uganda and by necessary implication prioritizing the ordinary and vulnerable people in Uganda who come to the courts in search of justice. The Government of Uganda has been consistent in improving the welfare of all Ugandans especially the poor who

are weighed down by the bondages of poverty and corruption through various bottom up interventions that directly impact on the vulnerable.

That is why, I committed Government in 2014, to enacting a law on legal aid and I would like to assure Ugandans that in due course a Legal Aid Bill will be introduced in Parliament.

Now that we have reestablished the rule of law, it is important that we address vulnerability in access to Justice. The proposal for a National Legal Aid Scheme is very welcome and is part of the NRM Government's cherished desires to restore the rule of law in Uganda after decades of misrule and extra-judicial killings. The scheme will buttress our efforts to promote sustainable development, prosperity and enduring peace. Provision of legal aid will take a progressive approach just like we addressed access to education beginning with Primary Education and then Universal Secondary Education. There is need for clear criteria for those to be supported targeting the genuine poor and vulnerable who cannot afford legal representation.

Reaffirming this truth, the NRM Government shall therefore, continue to strengthen, harmonize and assure a consistent legal, regulatory and policy environment conducive for national development as a core public good. In 1986, we found only one High Court at Kampala with a handful of Judges (8 in total). To date this number has been increased to 50 Judges and we plan to increase the number of High Court Judges and Justices of the Court of Appeal to 82 and 32 respectively. However, aware that the vulnerable are not in major urban centres, we need to increase the foot soldiers that provide services to the poor in the countryside. I therefore, support the proposal by the Chief Justice to have a chief magistrate in each district and a professional magistrate in every sub county in the medium term.

During the liberalization struggle that brought NRM to power in 1986, we used popular Resistance Councils to resolve local disputes in time. This is what we transformed into Local Councils. Local Councils are on the ground; they interact with the local people. Local Councils do not need wigs let alone the elaborate court infrastructure and procedures. We need to ensure that they are supported to perform their function so that professional Magistrates deal with the big cases and serious crime. We will

therefore work to ensure that the informal and formal systems work side by side and complement each other.

Ugandans want justice to be done and also crave to experience that Justice is seen to be done. The provision of legal aid to the vulnerable will strive to ensure equality of arms and have poor people represented. It will however be futile if justice delivery remains slow, urban based, limited to the courtrooms and delivered using colonial methodology without a human face

Therefore, Government will support the Justice Law and Order Sector to promote the use of alternative dispute resolution, establish a comprehensive legal aid regime for the indigent and vulnerable people and simplify the legal system. The Justice Law and Order Sector will also be supported to automate court processes and re-engineer procedures to reduce the time for accessing the courts. We shall also support the sector to ensure that unrepresented litigants are facilitated to use the legal system through legal aid clinics and self-help service points. Paralegals will be promoted to supplement the role of the legal profession in providing services to the population.

I applaud you in supporting our effort to fight corruption. The establishment of the Anti-Corruption Court is a good step in the right direction. However the corrupt are also using the slow court process to defeat the cause of justice. I think that public policy will be reluctant to extend legal aid to such people.

The Constitution gives Ugandans the right to apply for bail but does not grant a blanket right to bail. Those wishing to post bail applications when charged for committing serious crimes should not abuse legal aid. I know that to date granting bail remains at the discretion of Magistrates and Judges but this should be exercised in accordance with the values, norms and aspirations of the people on whose behalf courts administer Justice. It should be noted that delay of cases does not amount to a right for bail to be granted.

We have heavily invested in road infrastructure, and electricity generation and we have started on the standard gauge railway among other key strategic infrastructure projects. With these projects now in advanced

stages it is now time to address other critical needs such as office infrastructure for government departments. I applaud the Chief Justice and the JLOS stakeholders on the idea of a JLOS house. I am informed that procurement using the Private Public Partnership modality for a lead investor to construct the JLOS house is at negotiation stage. We strongly support this initiative and will provide the necessary resources to ensure its implementation. This project will be a benchmark for all social infrastructure projects that will be undertaken by Government in future. Investments such as the JLOS House Project are important to protect our investments, roads, energy and railway.

It is now honour and pleasure to declare the fourth National Legal Aid officially open.

For God and My Country.

H.E The President of the Republic of Uganda