



## **PRESS STATEMENT**

### **THE WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE HELD AT NAKIVUBO BLUE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal rights and opportunities for their economic, political, cultural and social well-being. Its overarching aims are to ensure social change and equality among individuals by opening the doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable persons. It emphasises the concept of "justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society." It is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous co-existence within communities and among nations. It envisions an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protection(s), opportunities, obligations, and social benefits. It further addresses a number of factors that affect social well-being such as poverty, economic disparities, limited and unequal access to health services, social relationships, education, environmental degradation, lack of social mobility, death penalty or high levels of incarceration, etc.

The objective of social justice is therefore to ensure that basic human and peoples' rights are upheld equitably and without prejudice. It stresses the need to understand multiple theories of justice and the various emerging forms or mechanisms of oppression and discrimination thereby advocating for practices and reforms that promote equitable enjoyment of living standards. Therefore, people are "not to be discriminated against, nor their welfare and well-being constrained or prejudiced on the basis of gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, belief, disability, location, social class, socio-economic circumstances, and any other characteristic of background.

The UN General Assembly proclaimed every 20<sup>th</sup> February as a World Day of Social Justice emphasising that observance of this day should support efforts in poverty eradication, the promotion of full employment and decent work, gender equity and access to social well-being and justice for all. It is clear that for the United Nations, the pursuit of social justice for all is a core global mission towards promoting development and human dignity.

Today as we commemorate the World Day of Social Justice, the UN has put focus on ending human trafficking and forced labour in its different forms, including debt bondage, trafficking in persons and other forms of modern slavery. The most vulnerable victims are the women and girls forced into prostitution, migrants trapped in debt bondage, and farm workers kept in employment by clearly illegal tactics while being paid little or nothing. Even as we strongly condemn human trafficking and forced labour as exhibited in its different forms across Uganda, we are also mindful of the plight faced by our remote communities, and the urban poor, in accessing education opportunities and enjoying its social benefits. A number of people (especially children) in need of basic education have not been given enough social protection in pursuing their education. Even those who have managed to meet their obligations and eventually completed school are not able to engage in productive work.

This state of affairs has led many to opt for opportunities elsewhere. A number of recruitment agencies in the country have exploited these unsuspecting job seekers through human trafficking and other emerging forms of modern slavery. The Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET) believes that more can be done to foster individuals' and families' well-being. Government policies should cushion temporary or permanent losses of income; assure minimum levels of social services; provide employment advisory support and job training; and extend assistance to those with special needs or vulnerabilities.

*"Take a stand; uphold the right to education for the urban poor"*

The Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme is a commendable effort since a number of school going children who are not able to pay the expensive charges of private education can be enrolled. However, the quality of this education has dwindled over the years. According to the World Bank development indicators, Uganda's completion rates in primary education for 2012 were estimated to be about 53%, compared to 81% in Tanzania, and 58% in Rwanda. Although enrolment has remained high, the drop-out rates in Uganda are appalling. A number of factors that cause school dropout include distances to schools, poor quality of education, inadequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, inappropriate language of instruction, teacher absenteeism, inability of households to pay school fees, and other costs or personal challenges associated with education.

This raises a number of social justice questions since education is undeniably a key contributing factor to the well-being of a population. Incidentally some schools have been demolished or relocated and replaced by other commercial investments without proper recourse to the law. A case in point is the Nabagereka Primary School, which was demolished on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015 after its land was leased to a city tycoon for investment. The school had 1,443 pupils and 22 teachers who are now being accommodated at Nakivubo Blue Primary School. In a similar incident in 2006, Shimoni Demonstration Primary School and Teacher Training Centre was relocated to East Kololo primary school and the land sold to an investor in order to build a luxury hotel. It had a population of over 10,000 pupils from Primary one to seven.

**In consideration of the above, LASPNET makes the following calls towards improving and upholding the right to education in Uganda:**

1. A call to all stakeholders to ensure
  - (a) Availability of proper infrastructure and facilities that comply with safety and sanitation standards,
  - (b) Equal access to school services regardless of age, religion, race, and geographical location,
  - (c) Inclusion of marginalized groups such as children from poor families, refugees, and the disabled,
  - (d) Quality of education that is relevant and culturally appropriate for all students,
  - (e) Adaptability of educational programmes to societal changes and the needs of our communities,
  - (f) Improvement of working conditions for teachers,
  - (g) Enhancement of existing systems for monitoring performance and evaluating standards, as well as reducing corruption and misuse of public resources.
2. An appeal to Government to allocate more resources to the Ministry of Education and Sports so that the programmes for special needs education, guidance and counselling, planning and policy analysis, as well as physical education and sports are effectively implemented. This also includes strengthening capacity of the Education Standards Agency to play its supervision and oversight role.
3. A request to the Ministry of Education and Sports to identify and steer the necessary reforms, through consultations with other stakeholders – the private sector, parents, teachers, academicians, policy analysts, civil society activists, employers, and students – to assess their efficacy.

Lastly, we implore the Kampala City Council Authorities, the various Law enforcement agencies, the Uganda Land Commission, policy makers (especially parliamentarians), and key decision makers to look into the issue of demolition of the urban schools and subsequent land grabbing by supposed investors.