

THE 3RD ANNUAL NATIONAL LEGAL AID CONFERENCE

SPEKE RESORT MUNYONYO

10TH AUGUST, 2015

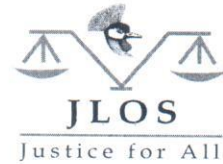
PRESS STATEMENT

It's my pleasure to address you concerning Legal Aid in Uganda and particularly, the upcoming National Legal Aid Conference due to take place on 10th August 2015 at the Commonwealth Speke Resort Munyonyo. The Purpose of this Conference is to create awareness about the on-going efforts to establish a Policy, Law and National Institution on Legal Aid. The ultimate objective of the Conference is to fast track the establishment of the National Legal Aid Body.

Legal Aid is the provision of free legal services to the poor, vulnerable and marginalised people who cannot afford the services of paid lawyers. Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda provides for Equality before the Law. To ensure equality of all persons before the Law and to enhance access to Justice, the provision of Legal Aid is critical.

As such, Government of Uganda has put in place measures to ensure that there is fairness in the Administration of Justice. Currently, State legal aid service providers include the Judiciary through the State Brief Scheme under which every person charged with a Capital offence is provided with an advocate at the Cost of the State, Justice Centres Uganda which is a Project of the Justice





Law and Order Sector that provides Legal Aid on behalf of the State across civil and criminal justice and the Human Rights Commission. Legal aid has thus far been provided by non state actors such as FIDA and the Legal Aid Project of the Uganda Law Society.

THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL LEGAL AID BODY:

The Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) with support from the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) and in consultation with other state and non state actors developed the National Legal Aid Policy which is currently before cabinet for approval. After that, a National Legal Aid Bill shall be tabled before Parliament. The passing of this law will result in the establishment of a National Body with a mandate to provide Legal Aid across all areas of the Law.

The Government is committed to supporting programmes that promote economic development. The provision of legal Aid greatly empowers individuals and communities as a whole and as such, a comprehensive delivery of State funded legal Aid would in the long term result in the realisation of Uganda's development aspirations espoused in Vision 2040.

To have Legal Aid in place, the Government and indeed all the other stakeholders will need to be clear on how it will be funded and how sustainable this funding will be. Furthermore, it is critical that the service offered is of good professional quality and that there are standards in place to ensure this. The Conference is therefore, going to spend a significant amount of time investigating these issues and to this end we have invited legal aid practitioners from other jurisdictions including South Africa and the USA to learn from the best. They will share experiences on how they have





ensured a sustainable professional legal aid service delivery to the extent that in South Africa, even people who can afford the service are requesting the legal aid programme to open a section for those who can afford. We know that these will go a long way in informing Uganda's efforts towards legal aid delivery by the State.

THE Conference shall be officiated by H.E. the President of the Republic of Uganda and at this conference, we shall take stock of how far we have come and come up with a way forward on when, how, how much money, and all other modalities required to support legal aid services by the State of Uganda.

Government is therefore in full support of the establishment of the body and will provide the requisite guidance and support towards this cause. I therefore invite you to create as much awareness as possible about these efforts in order to generate discussions and consultations about what this service should look like.

I thank you!

Hon. Mwesigwa Rukutana (M.P)

Deputy Attorney General and Minister of State for Justice and Constitutional Affairs

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