

## Highlights of the Chief Justice's Visit to Rukiga Magistrate's Court

The Chief Justice, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, yesterday visited Rukiga Magistrate's Court in Rukiga District, where he engaged judicial officers and justice sector stakeholders to assess service delivery and gather feedback on access to justice in the area.

He was accompanied by Justice Karoli Lwanga Ssemogerere and the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Judiciary, Dr. Pius Bigirimana, as well as the Acting Chief Registrar, HW Lamunu Pamella Ocaya.

The engagement brought together judicial officers, representatives from the Uganda Police Force, Uganda Prisons Service, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, advocates, district leaders, and religious leaders.

In his remarks, the Chief Justice highlighted recent amendments to the Magistrates Courts Act, noting that the pecuniary jurisdiction of Magistrates Grade I has been increased from UGX 20 million to UGX 100 million, while that of Chief Magistrates has risen from UGX 50 million to UGX 200 million. He explained that this reform is intended to reduce the distance litigants travel to access justice and to enhance efficiency at lower courts.



Justice Zeija outlined key initiatives under the Judiciary's transformation agenda, including decentralization of the Inspectorate of Courts and the Court of Appeal, the rollout of mobile courts to serve hard-to-reach communities, and ongoing infrastructure development across the country.

He also emphasized the promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), particularly mediation, referencing the recently issued Judicature (Court Annexed Mediation) Rules, 2026. He noted that mediation fosters amicable settlement of disputes, reduces appeals, and contributes to timely justice delivery. He further highlighted ongoing efforts to train local, cultural, and religious leaders in mediation to enhance community-level dispute resolution.

The Chief Justice commended Rukiga District for offering land for the construction of a court and reiterated the Judiciary's policy of establishing at least one Grade I Magistrate's Court per constituency, with additional courts based on need. He acknowledged existing staffing gaps but assured stakeholders that recruitment of more judicial officers will be undertaken when resources allow.

On the absence of a State Attorney in Rukiga, he pledged to engage the ODPP to explore deployment options, noting that this gap contributes to delays in criminal case disposal. He also advised the Chief Magistrate to utilize operational funds to address basic challenges such as water and electricity connections at the court.

Regarding transport, the Chief Justice explained that priority has been given to hard-to-reach areas such as Rukiga, Kisoro, and Kabale, with plans to provide additional vehicles over time.

Addressing concerns about the lack of a female prison facility in the district, he acknowledged the logistical challenges involved but committed to engaging the Uganda Prisons Service on the matter.

Justice Ssemogerere noted that Rukiga had gone for years without an operational court following the phasing out of Grade II Courts, describing the establishment of the current court as a major milestone. However, he raised concerns about the distance between some newly established courts within the district, including Kamwezi and Rwamucucu.

In his remarks, Dr. Bigirimana urged the district to provide adequate land, at least 1.5 acres, for court construction, noting that insufficient space could hinder development. He pledged to provide a motorcycle and a computer to the court before the end of June and assured stakeholders that furniture, signage, and fencing would also be addressed.

He further emphasized his role in mobilizing resources for the Judiciary, including infrastructure, transport, and human resources, and reaffirmed his continued support to the Chief Justice's transformation agenda.

The Kabale Chief Magistrate, HW Byamugisha Derrick, reported that although four courts have been gazetted in Rukiga (Rukiga, Kamwezi, Rwamucucu, and Muhanga Town Council), only

Rukiga is operational. He highlighted several challenges, including lack of ICT equipment, furniture, electricity, water, signage, staffing, and transport.

Senior Superintendent of Police Twinomugisha Steven (DPC Rukiga) acknowledged improved coordination among justice institutions but raised concerns about the absence of a State Attorney, which has led to delays in case sanctioning and prolonged detention of suspects.

The Resident District Commissioner, Mr. Zadock Kamusiime, described the visit as historic, noting that it was the first time a sitting Chief Justice had visited the district. He expressed optimism that the engagement would contribute to improved justice service delivery in Rukiga.

A request was also made for the establishment of a Chief Magistrate's Court in the district.

The engagement was moderated by the Judiciary's Public Relations Officer, HW James Ereemye Jumire Mawanda.

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