



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

SPEECH BY

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***AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SYMPOSIUM ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND
FIGHTING IMPUNITY OF SGBV IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION***

THURSDAY 7TH JULY 2016

LAKE VICTORIA SERENA GOLF RESORT, ENTEBBE

- *Ambassador Zachary Muburi-Muita, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR),*
- *Hon Justice Mike Chibita, the Director of Public Prosecution, Uganda*
- *Ambassador Ibrahima Fall, the AU Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region*
- *The Representative of the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region.*
- *Mr Innocent Zahinda, Director UN Team of Experts/ Sexual Violence in Conflict-representing Under Secretary General, Zainab Bangura*
- *Your Excellences, Ambassadors from the various countries*
- *Ambassador Rossette Nyirikindi, representing the ICGLR National Coordinator, Uganda*
- *Mr. Nathan M Byamukama, the Aq. Director, the Regional Training center on Prevention of Sexual Violence*
- *Members of the Diplomatic Corp in Uganda*
- *Distinguished Participants*
- *Members and Representatives of the Private Sector, Media and Civil Society*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen*

It is a pleasure and honour for me to join you at the official opening of this Symposium that brings together experts to deliberate on the critical concern of access to justice as a means to end impunity for Gender Based Violence in Africa and the ICGLR countries in particular. I wish to extend a very warm welcome to everyone and wish our visitors a pleasant stay in Uganda.

In a special way, I wish to welcome and congratulate H.E. Ambassador Zachary Muburi-Muita for his appointment in June this year as Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and for accepting to grace this occasion.

We look forward to work with you for the successful outcome of the commitments Member States have made under ICGLR including the commitments under the Kampala Declaration of 2011 to Prevent, End Impunity and Provide Support to Victims of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

It is within this context that Government of Uganda offered to host the Regional Training Facility (RTF) which was established in 2014 and the offices located in my Ministry. As has been mentioned, the mandate of the RTF is to train and sensitize the judiciary, police units, social workers, doctors and other categories of people who handle cases of sexual violence on how to operate effectively and efficiently.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development is honoured to have this strategic partnership with the ICGLR through the RTF that generates benefits for the ICGLR Member States, other African Nations and Partners around the world. In this regard Uganda is ready to support the RTF to become a Center of Excellency in the Region and on the entire African continent.

I therefore extend our gratitude to the Friends and Partners of the ICGLR who have supported the establishment of the RTF and in organizing the various trainings. We look forward to continued collaboration in the struggle to bring an end the crime of sexual and gender based violence. I would also like to appreciate the efforts of the Ag. Director of the RTF Mr. Nathan Byamukama for steering the Facility effectively to be able to deliver on its core mandate within the short period of its establishment.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The focus of this training on access to justice is a key component of the response mechanisms for GBV cases. Access to justice is a human right for men, women and children as it provides those whose rights have been denied or breached with an avenue to seek effective remedies. In the context of gender based violence this is a very crucial aspect of addressing impunity and injustice.

Access to justice relates to the processes and systems through which justice is administered and addresses availability of court structures, judicial officers, law enforcement agents, lawyers and health professionals as well as social workers. Secondly the fairness of the system in meeting the concerns of men and women, who access it, is important.

Female victims and survivors of violence, particularly those in post conflict settings more often than not face structural barriers to justice. Women tend to be disproportionately represented amongst the poor due to discriminatory and exclusionary practices, and this affects their ability to access justice. In this respect, it is critical for all actors in the justice delivery value chain; the Judiciary, Police, Prosecutors, Probation and Community Development Officers, Health Workers, Civil Society Organisations offering legal aid and shelters as well as counselling to work together on a partnership basis, continually identifying gaps and required interventions for ensuring justice.

The phenomenon of SGBV is widespread in Africa and is entrenched in social norms that continue to reinforce gender discrimination and violence. In most African countries including Uganda, there is a high cultural acceptance of violence as a normal occurrence in situations of conflict as well as in times of peace. As a result, social tolerance of violent behaviour becomes the norm for many men and women.

This is often intensified by duty bearers handling sexual violence as a “private affair” which prevents those affected from speaking out and seeking support. Victims of sexual violence also feel stigmatized, which inhibits reporting.

The Government of Uganda has recognised that SGBV is a national problem and of growing concern due to its devastating effects on the individual, family community and the entire Country. The consequences of social exclusion, psychological distress, mental illness, spread of HIV and STD infections, unwanted pregnancies and the trauma experienced by victims add to the direct negative impact on the dignity of victims and productivity in general. The cost of treating the effects of SGBV from an economic and public health perspective are very high.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it must be noted that Uganda is committed to eradication of GBV in all its forms. An enabling legal and policy framework to combat SGBV is in place.

My Ministry has spearheaded the development of the National Policy and Action Plan on Elimination of Gender Based Violence which is currently before Cabinet for approval. The Ministry is also part of the Justice Law and Order Sector, which has prioritised combating SGBV in the Strategic Investment Plan across the 12 institutions administering justice in Uganda.

The Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2010 and regulations were established in 2011. The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act and the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act were passed in 2009. In 2012 regulations to give effect to the provisions on sexual harassment in the Employment Act were developed.

Overall, our Government has made tremendous efforts to ensure that GBV prevention and response strategies are integrated in the main development frameworks including Vision 2040, the National Development Plan II and the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for Northern Uganda.

Government has also developed a comprehensive Action Plan with measurable and time bound activities to implement the UN Security Council Resolutions 1820 and 1325 on the protection of women in times of conflict and enhancing their involvement in in peace building.

A coordination mechanism to prevent and respond to GBV in a holistic manner including resource mobilisation and capacity building has also been established under the Ministry. The mechanism has facilitated better understanding and collaboration among all stakeholders.

At regional and international level, Uganda has ratified the various instruments that support the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment and prohibit gender based discrimination and violence against women and girls. These include the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol. Uganda also ratified the ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability and development and it integral Protocol on Prevention and Suppression of sexual Violence against Women and Children (2006).

This training therefore is timely, as issues of access to justice and appropriate responses to ensure prevention as well as provision of adequate medical and legal services to survivors are high on the regional agenda. I believe that the deliberations of this meeting will generate innovative ideas,

insights and proposals for more effective, meaningful and appropriate justice delivery mechanisms to ensure that men, women and children everywhere in Africa live in a safe, dignified and peaceful environment.

As I conclude, I wish to take this opportunity to thank everybody present for participating in this Symposium and for the work you are carrying out for the well-being of our society.

I also wish to extend an invitation to our visitors, to take time off after this meeting to enjoy the good weather, and tourist sites that we have in abundance before you return to your Countries.

It is now my pleasure to declare the Symposium officially opened.

Thank You

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY