

DCJ Flags Off Kabale's First Court of Appeal Civil Appeals Session, Highlights Efforts to Decentralize the Court of Appeal

The Deputy Chief Justice, Justice Dr. Flavian Zeija, has officially opened a three-day Court of Appeal Civil Appeals Session in Kabale, marking a historic first for the region. The session, which runs from November 11th to 13th, 2025, is expected to handle 42 civil appeals and is presided over by a panel comprising Justice Dr. Zeija, Justice John Mike Musisi, and Justice Musa Ssekaana.



Speaking during a stakeholders' engagement meeting, Justice Dr. Zeija explained that while Kabale has hosted annual criminal appeals sessions since 2023, this is the first time a civil appeals session is being held there. He noted that the Court of Appeal had for a long time concentrated on criminal appeals, but stakeholders across the country, including those from Kabale, requested that civil sessions also be conducted regionally. Responding to these appeals, the Judiciary started regional civil

sessions in 2023, and Kabale now becomes the fifth host after Gulu, Mbarara, Jinja, and Fort Portal. Dr. Zeija assured stakeholders that many more sessions will follow as part of the Judiciary's efforts to enhance access to justice.

He emphasized that holding regional sessions helps litigants cut down on transportation and litigation costs and brings justice closer to the people. In the long term, he revealed, the Judiciary's plan is to establish regional circuits of the Court of Appeal. These have already been approved for Gulu, Mbarara, Mbale, Masaka, Fort Portal, Arua, Jinja, and Mubende, with construction already underway in Gulu and Mbarara and others to follow as funds and land become available. He noted that this decentralization directly supports the Judiciary's strategic goal of improving access to justice for all Ugandans.

Dr. Zeija acknowledged that the Court of Appeal faces a heavy workload due to limited manpower but assured the public that the appointing authority has committed to filling all 35 positions of Justices as provided by law. "The future of justice delivery at the Court of Appeal looks bright," he remarked. He commended advocates who promptly filed written submissions and other justice actors who made the session possible, pledging that judgments will be delivered within a reasonable time. He reaffirmed that clearing the backlog of cases remains one of the Judiciary's top priorities.

On the use of information technology, the Deputy Chief Justice highlighted that the Court of Appeal is now fully paperless, with all filings, payments, and judgments handled electronically through the Electronic Court Case Management

Information System (ECCMIS). He noted that the Court also employs audio-visual technology to conduct hearings remotely and urged all stakeholders to embrace these innovations. He further encouraged the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as mediation, plea bargaining, reconciliation, and the small claims procedure, noting that these approaches reduce case

backlog and provide quicker, fairer, and more affordable justice. The DCJ reminded stakeholders that all courts are now required to conduct at least one case settlement fortnight every quarter.

The Resident Judge of Kabale High Court, Justice Karoli Lwanga Ssemogerere, commended the Deputy Chief Justice for his leadership and continuous support. He reported that the Court has made steady progress in handling civil, land, and family matters and continues to work closely with partners such as the Attorney General's Office, the Ministry of Lands, and the Ministry of Labour to address issues of child protection, land disputes, and the welfare of vulnerable persons. Justice Ssemogerere particularly appreciated the Kabale Office of the Ministry of Lands for its vital role in providing information to resolve land-related cases and reaffirmed the Circuit's commitment to strengthening justice delivery in the Kigezi sub-region.



Representing the Attorney General's Chambers, Ms. Rita Kalembe, Senior State Attorney, commended the Judiciary for its efforts in enhancing access to justice and taking services closer to the people. She shared that the Attorney General's Chambers is complementing these efforts by establishing regional offices to ease the workload currently managed by a single office in Mbarara, which covers more than 27 districts in the Central, Ankole, and Kigezi regions. She noted that these regional offices will improve service delivery, particularly in estate administration and matters involving vulnerable individuals. She also applauded the Resident Judge of Kabale for introducing special sessions for cases involving the Attorney General, which have improved attendance and expedited case handling.

Ms. Rebecca Ayesiga of the Uganda Law Society, called for the speedy disposal of cases that have been pending in the system for years. The Resident District Commissioner of Rukiga District, Mr. Zadoch Kamusiime, raised concern about fraudulent money lenders in the region and appealed to the Judiciary to handle such cases through ADR mechanisms. He observed that since parties in such disputes often know where the truth lies, mediation can lead to amicable settlements. He also requested training in ADR for RDC offices, which frequently mediate disputes at the community level.



The event drew a wide range of participants, including judicial officers, representatives from the Uganda Police Force, the Uganda Prisons Service, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, religious leaders, and law students from Kabale University. Among those present were HW Dr. Alex Mushabe Karocho, Private Legal Secretary to the Deputy Chief Justice; HW Julius Mwesigye, Personal Assistant to the Deputy Chief Justice; Ms. Charlotte Kabaseke from the Faculty of Law at Kabale University; Rev. Fr. Fred Birungi, Parish Priest of Christ the King Church, Kabale; and Ms. Julie Najjunju, Senior State Attorney from the DPP's office. The meeting was moderated by HW Kenneth Tumwebaze, Assistant Registrar of the Kabale High Court.

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