



UGANDA LAW SOCIETY

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LAUNCH OF THE PRISONS DECONGESTION AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE PROJECT

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By Lynn Komugisha

The Uganda Law Society in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Uganda (UNODC) has launched a prison decongestion program aimed at enhancing access to justice, improving welfare, and increasing legal awareness for inmates and juveniles as well as increasing capacity for prison officers.

The project will be implemented in the Districts of Jinja, Gulu, Arua, Mbale and Mbarara in partnership with key stakeholders like State Attorneys, the Judiciary, and Probono lawyers among others.

The launch attracted participants from the judiciary, government, legal fraternity, and civil society organizations among others.





Remarks by the ULS CEO

While giving opening remarks at the launch, the CEO of Uganda Law Society revealed that this partnership couldn't have come at a better time, following the Covid 19 pandemic that saw the country's prisons receive overwhelming numbers which presented a great challenge to the management of these prisons while ensuring that the pandemic is contained.

He commended the UNODC for their efforts in enhancing access to justice, by equipping a number of prisons countrywide with teleconferencing equipment and advancing resources in response to the pandemic



Mrs. Pheona Wall the President of Uganda Law society at the launch of this project said; *“This launch is akin to being the light at the end of a dark tunnel to an inmate somewhere in a Ugandan prison who you might discover has never been convicted but has been on remand without an ounce of hope on when they can appear before a competent court of law.”*

The Uganda Law Society President added, that with this decongestion program, I believe that inmates will now be in a position to receive more than legal representation since this program will also focus on the rehabilitation and welfare of the inmates during and after incarceration.

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“Currently, out of a total number of 65,835 prisoners, in Ugandan prisons, 34,795 are remanded whose numbers keep increasing day by day and only 31,040 are convicts. Pretrial detainees, therefore, constitute 52.8 % of the overall prison population today as opposed to 48.2 % in 2020. 40% of the pretrial detainees have been on remand longer than the period of sentence for the offense for which they are being accused,” She revealed

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*Remarks by the DPP Lady Justice
Jane Frances Abodo*



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“As the ODPP, Prison Decongestion is taken seriously and the decision to charge should be made cautiously, intelligently with a human face because of the importance it holds as it affects generations.”

Remarks by the US Vice President



The Vice President of Uganda Law society who also doubles as the chairperson of legal aid and Probono Project revealed that; “Uganda has the second most overcrowded prisons in Africa. She noted that during the lockdown many people were imprisoned for minor cases and are still languishing in different prisons.”

All these issues are the reason this project is timely and will go a long way in enhancing access to justice, improving welfare, increasing legal awareness for inmates and juveniles as well as increasing the capacity for prison officers while decongesting these prisons

Remarks by the UN Regional Representative on Drugs and Crime



The Regional Representative United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Neil Walsh said that; “the prisons should be left to accommodate inmates with criminal cases and the rest should be handled through other means like pre bargaining, community service, caution among others.”

He highlighted the key objectives of the project which are; enhancing access to justice for inmates in detention centers, supporting processes for the reduction of case backlog, increasing awareness by inmates of their rights, and legal options while also increasing awareness of the negative effects of long detention.

Remarks by the Chief Guest

The Guest of Honor; Hon. Justice Musa Sekaana said, "it is a very key development for the Judiciary to be part of this prison de-congestion project because it is at the receiving end of ensuring law and order, noting that the project will not only enhance performance but also improve standards of performance because we don't want mediocrity in the justice system if we're to address the issue of case backlog."



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