

Museveni orders quick community trial for Ggaba toddler murder suspect

BY STEPHEN OTAGE & ANTHONY WESAKA

KAMPALA. President Museveni has directed the Judiciary to fast-track the trial of the prime suspect in last week's killing of four toddlers in Ggaba and have the proceedings conducted within the community where the crime allegedly occurred so that residents can witness justice being dispensed.

The directive, which could make the case one of the first recent civilian matters to be heard through a community-based mobile court, was revealed yesterday by Principal Judge Jane Frances Abodo during the funeral service of retired Supreme Court Justice Augustine Nshimye in Kampala.

"His Excellency says this case must be handled. Can you test the mobile court directives that you made as a Judiciary?" Justice Abodo said, relaying the President's message.

She added: "Take the court to where the incident happened and handle the case there. And handle it fast. Of course, we always say that first in, first out. But the exceptions, when they are public interest cases, they can be handled. And I think this one fits that."

Mobile courts.
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- Chief Justice Flavian Zeija

The country was thrown into shock on the eve of Good Friday after reports emerged that Christopher Okello Onyum fatally stabbed four toddlers aged between one and two years at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Programme.

The suspect is also accused of injuring another child during the attack.

Justice Abodo said the Judiciary intends to use the recently operationalised mobile court system to quickly dispose of the matter, since Ggaba does not have a High Court station capable of handling the case.

During the funeral service, the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, Stephen Kaziimba, expressed concern over the brutal killing of the children, wondering how "a normal human being can casually kill four innocent children."

The prelate also cautioned against granting bail to suspects accused of grave offences, while some deserving applicants remain in custody.

Justice Nshimye, who served in all three arms of government — the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary, is expected to be laid to rest today at Namutamba Village in Bulera Sub-county, Mityana District.

The Judiciary's mobile court framework was formally introduced about a fortnight ago by Chief Justice Flavian Zeija through Legal Notice No. 1 of 2026, the Constitution (Operation of Mobile Courts) (Practice) Directions, 2026.

The directions, gazetted on March 19, are anchored under Article 133(1) (b) of the Constitution and allow judicial officers to conduct proceedings outside conventional court premises.

Under the new framework, cases can be heard in designated facilities such as public buildings, vehicles, and other temporary locations to bring justice services closer to communities.

The system is expected to particularly support justice delivery in remote districts, refugee-hosting areas, islands, and other underserved communities where access to court services remains difficult.

"Our transformation agenda calls for a Judiciary that is people-centred, efficient, and accountable. Mobile courts will help us reduce barriers to justice, address case backlog, and ensure that no one is denied justice because of distance or limited access to court services," Justice Zeija recently said while unveiling the framework.

Although the practice of mobile courts is common in military justice, where court martial sessions are often conducted within communities or military detachments, its use in civilian criminal trials remains rare.

Security sources indicate that Okello, who is said to have previously lived in the United States before returning to Uganda, allegedly disguised himself as a parent seeking placement for a child at the school before carrying out the attack.

About 24 hours after the killings, the State Minister for Higher Education, Mr John Chrysostom Muyingo, visited the school and ordered its immediate closure.

At a memorial service for the four toddlers held yesterday in Ggaba, the State Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Mr Balaam Barugahara, said the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, was of the view that the suspect should face trial before the General Court Martial due to the gravity of the alleged offence and his reported criminal history.

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