

place the fallen legislator.

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BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

KAMPALA. The government has raised concern over the rising number of children coming into conflict with the law, attributing the trend largely to parental neglect and weak family structure.

Speaking at the 2026 National Performance Review Conference on Uganda's Development Agenda last Thursday, the Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Mr Norbert Mao, said cases involving juveniles have increased sharply, putting pressure on remand homes across the country.

Figures from the Justice ministry indicate that the remand population rose from 1,111 in the 2023/2024 financial year to 5,426 in 2024/2025. Mr Mao linked the trend to poor parenting, delays in resettling children, and systemic gaps in handling juvenile offenders.

"I'm sure many of you have found people who proudly call themselves single mothers. There is no mother who produces without another party. Government needs to be tough on fathers who neglect their children," he said.

Mr Mao warned that children who

grow up without proper guidance from parents or guardians are more vulnerable to negative peer influence and criminal behaviour.

He cited additional challenges, including inadequate funding for probation officers to conduct family tracing and resettlement, reluctance by families to receive rehabilitated juveniles, and lack of transport to facilitate court appearances.

According to the National Annual Performance Report for the 2024/2025 financial year, presented by the Office of the Prime Minister, congestion in remand homes had reached 645 percent by December 2025, the highest level recorded in the past five years.

Mr Mao described the situation as critical, noting that Uganda's youthful population is increasingly at risk.

"Sometimes when children are in remand homes, parents feel relieved. When we take these children back, families often reject them," he said.

Mr Dickson Tumuramy, a parenting coach and marriage counsellor, said

lack of parental involvement deprives children of direction and discipline.

"When a parent is not involved in a child's life, the child lacks guidance and cannot clearly distinguish between right and wrong," he said.

He added that children raised without boundaries are more likely to disregard authority and engage in risky behaviour.

"They grow up without clear limits and believe whatever they are doing is acceptable because no one has guided them," he said.

BACKGROUND

According to the 2025 Annual Police Crime Report, 3,303 juveniles were involved in crime, up from 2,268 cases recorded in 2024. Of these, 2,908 were male while 400 were female, indicating a growing gender disparity in juvenile offences.

Mr Tumuramy emphasised the importance of co-parenting, urging parents to remain actively involved in their children's upbringing. Where this is not possible, he advised single parents to seek support systems and maintain firm discipline.

"In the absence of a father figure, some boys develop rebellious tendencies. It is important that alternative guidance is provided to help shape their behaviour," he said.

Despite the challenges, government says efforts are underway to address congestion in remand homes and improve access to justice for juveniles.

Mr Mao said the Judiciary is being supported to deploy judicial officers to remand homes to conduct special juvenile court sessions aimed at speeding up case disposal.

He added that, in collaboration with development partners, the government is establishing court spaces within remand homes and promoting diversion programmes that redirect children who commit minor offences away

from the formal justice system.

Other measures include expanding non-custodial sentencing, reviewing bail processes, and investing in infrastructure.

The Minister for General Duties in the Office of the Prime Minister, Ms Justine Kasule Lumumba, said children on remand account for 81 percent of all juvenile offenders, far above the national target of 65 percent.

"These children face prolonged pre-trial detention, sometimes exceeding seven months, in highly congested facilities," she said.

The report also highlights limited access to legal aid and diversion services, as well as delays in handling cases involving children.

Ms Lumumba recommended the re-operationalisation of magistrates' courts and strengthening of legal frameworks to ensure faster case disposal. She said improving coordination between justice institutions would help reduce case backlog and ease pressure on remand facilities.