Museveni: Mental wellness key in tackling case backlog

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BY ANTHONY WESAKA

President Museveni has urged judges to prioritise their mental and physical wellness, warning that unchecked pressure from heavy caseloads and public scrutiny undermines productivity and delays justice delivery.

In a speech read by Vice President Jessica Alupo during the 27th Annual Judges' Conference in Kampala yesterday, the President said a healthy, organised Judiciary is better placed to clear cases, manage pressure and deliver predictable justice.

"Let us be honest. Backlogs are not caused by laws alone. They arise from systems, organisation, leadership and human capacity. Judges are human beings. They carry heavy workloads, face public pressure and handle emotionally demanding matters," Mr Museveni said.

"If this pressure is not well managed, it affects output. Judicial wellness is, therefore, not a peripheral concern; it is a strategic governance issue," he added.

According to the latest Judiciary census case file report, there are 167,353 cases pending across all court levels, of which 46,542 are classified as backlog. A case is considered backlogged if it remains unresolved for more than two years. On average, each judicial officer is handling about 305 pending cases, including 85 backlog cases.

This year's conference is themed "Judicial Wellness: A Tool for Effective Case Management."

The President described the theme as "timely and strategic", noting that while the 1995 Constitution vests judicial power in the people, the promise of accessible, timely and impartial justice cannot be realised if judges are overwhelmed or unsupported.

"Fatigue leads to delay; delay leads to dissatisfaction; and dissatisfaction leads to instability," he said.

Chief Justice Flavian Zeija said the nature of cases handled by judges can have a profound impact on their mental wellness, citing traumatic criminal trials as particularly demanding.



Vice President Jessica Alupo shares a light moment with Principal Judge Jane Frances Abodo (second left), Justice Mike Chibita (centre) and other judges upon arrival for the judges' conference at Speke Resort Munyonyo yesterday. PHOTO/COURTESY OF JUDICIARY



Chief Justice Flavian Zeija addresses judges at the conference yesterday. PHOTOS/COURTESY OF JUDICIARY

ment and decision-making," he said.

He encouraged judges to form peer-support groups to help identify early signs of mental distress among colleagues, noting that judges often lead isolated lives.

"One might not know that a colle[illegible] is struggling until mistakes are made. Early support can prevent serious consequences like a judge handling a civil case ending up sentencing a litigant to death," he said.

Vice President Alupo, speaking on the same theme, called for openness in addressing mental health challenges and decried the stigma surrounding mental health facilities. She shared a personal tale about being discouraged from living in Butabika due to perceptions associated with the area, hon to Uganda's national referral mental health hospital.

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