

# COURT BLOCKS CLOSURE OF BRIDGE SCHOOLS

BY JOHN SEMAKULA

The High Court has issued an order halting the closure of Bridge Schools.

Court said that the schools can only be closed after the case they filed recently against the Attorney General, seeking to block their imminent closure, is dispensed.

The order was issued on February 9 by Justice Sarah Langa, the deputy registrar of the court who is presiding over the case whose hearing commences this month.

"The status quo as of today is maintained, until the matter is heard. As stated, the schools are open and pupils are studying, that is the status quo to maintain," the order read.

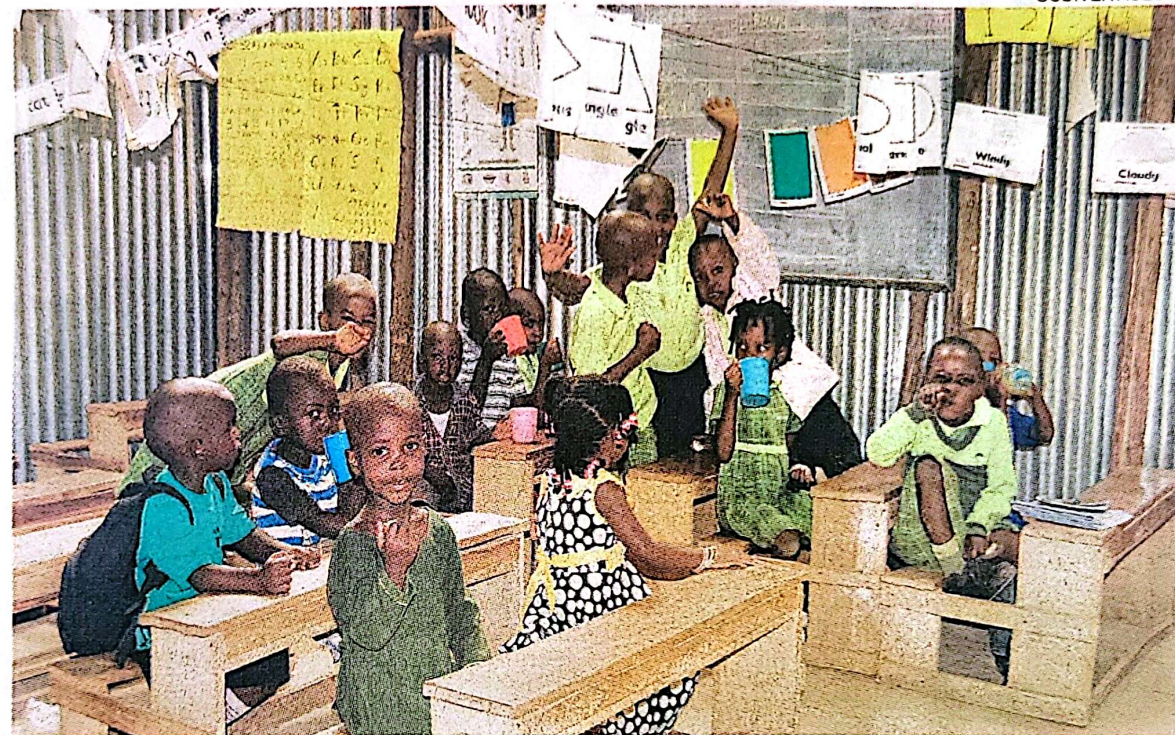
The management of Bridge Schools petitioned court after Government directed them not to open for the new term that started early this month.

The schools filed the petition through their lawyers, Kenneth Muhanga and Patson Arinaitwe. The Attorney General is the sole respondent in the miscellaneous application No. 71 of 2018.

The court order comes at a time when there is a lot of controversy surrounding the legality of Bridge Schools.

## THE CONTROVERSY

In November last year, the education ministry issued a directive to Bridge Schools, to update their status or face closure. The schools were ordered not to open for the



Children of Bridge International Academy in Kasokoso, Kampala playing during breaktime

new term, unless they acquired a licence.

Earlier, a ministry report on the schools had revealed that the academies lacked standard classroom blocks to accommodate learners.

Citing the report, the education minister, Janet Museveni, recently said all the facilities of Bridge

Schools were temporary, with school structures made of roofing sheets and wire mesh not suitable to accommodate learners during hot seasons.

The report also said both girls and boys in the schools and teachers shared the same sanitation facilities, making the environment unfit for a school.

*Sunday Vision* has learnt that in some districts, such as Wakiso, where local leaders had started closing the schools, they have been served with the court order to stop.

It is now unclear what the ministry will do next because Mrs. Museveni had insisted that Government spares no effort to use all legal means to enforce the law to protect the

children and the future of Uganda. "These schools are operating illegally and no one can guarantee the safety and security of children in the hands of unknown adults," she said.

Recently, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), a non-governmental organisation which first exposed the entry of Bridge Schools in Uganda, petitioned the education ministry, asking it to strengthen its regulatory role in the sector.

"It's not enough to advise parents to desist from enrolling their children in schools that do not meet the standards because the public has no capacity to know which schools do not meet the standards," read the petition dated February 2.

## BRIDGE SCHOOLS RESPOND

In a press statement dated February 6, the management of Bridge Schools explained that the situation is not as bad as the ministry's report said.

About the quality of the school buildings, the statement said they have 42 architectural blueprints approved and corresponding occupation permits issued by the district physical planning committee all submitted to the Ministry of Education.

Management also said they obtained the occupation permits for 63 schools in the different parts of the country after following the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) requirements.