

BY FRED WAMBEDE

Mediation of Bugisu cultural leadership dispute starts

MBALE. A long-running leadership dispute within the Bugisu cultural institution (Bukuuka Bwa Bugisu) has entered a decisive phase, with court-led mediation now underway at the High Court in Mbalé in a bid to resolve deep divisions among the Bamasaba community.

The mediation, facilitated by the Judiciary under its Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) framework, officially commenced on April 24. It is intended to consolidate and resolve multiple pending court cases while restoring unity in a cultural institution that has been fractured since around 2020.

At the centre of the dispute are competing claims to the position of Umukuuka, the supreme cultural leader of the Bamasaba.

On one side is Jude Mike Mudoma, who currently leads the Bugisu cultural institution and is recognised by government authorities. On the opposing side are rival claimants aligned to the Inzu Ya Masaba faction, including

John Amram Wagabyalire, Masolo Yaya Gidudu—who identifies as Umukuuka III—and Joram Joram Khambo, who claims the title of Umukuuka IV.

The mediation is being presided over by a five-member panel chaired by Justice Richard Buteera, Deputy Chief Justice Emeritus. Other members include Justice Yorokamu Bamwine, Justice Prof Andrew Khaukha, Francis Atoke, and senior counsel Francis Gimara.

During the preliminary sitting, the panel concentrated on procedural matters, including confirmation of all parties, alignment on legal representation, and setting timelines for submissions.

Justice Buteera directed all lawyers to file a formal mediation agreement, case summaries, and a clear statement of issues by May 15, ahead of substantive discussions.

“The mediation is aimed at achieving consensus rather than delivering a court ruling. I urge the media to report responsibly to avoid inflaming ten-

sions,” he said. The dispute largely stems from disagreements over the election and gazette process of the Umukuuka, questions surrounding the legitimacy of cultural institutions, and con-

BACKGROUND

The leadership dispute within the Bugisu cultural institution has dragged on for years, centring on competing claims to the title of Umukuuka. The current government-recognised Umukuka Jude Mike Mudoma is being challenged by the Inzu Ya Masaba faction, which fronts rival claimants including John Amram Wagabyalire, Masolo Yaya Gidudu, who calls himself Umukuuka III, and Joram Joram Khambo, who claims to be Umukuuka IV.

trol over cultural authority structures. These disagreements have escalated into more than 30 separate cases filed before the High Court.

Among the key cases under mediation are Civil Suit No 43 of 2023 (Wagabyalire vs Attorney General), Civil Suit No 63 of 2023 (Sakwa vs Attorney General), and Civil Suit No 40 of 2025 (Mudoma vs Walimbwa Charles Peke & others), alongside several other related claims.

Supporters of Umukuka Mudoma say they are pushing for recognition of a single, unified cultural leadership and an end to parallel claims that have caused confusion within the community.

The institution has also faced additional turbulence following a government decision in May last year, through the Ministry of Gender, which changed the institution's name from Inzu Ya Masaba to Bugisu Cultural Institution. The parallel faction rejected the change.

Lawyer Joseph Massa, representing the Bugisu cultural institution, said the

mediation provides an opportunity to address deeper issues beyond legal disputes.

“This dispute has persisted for years with multiple claimants emerging. Mediation gives all parties a chance to resolve not just legal questions, but also underlying identity concerns,” he said.

Bugisu cultural institution spokesperson Stephen Masiga said their focus is peace, stability, and clarity of leadership without competing claimants.

However, leaders aligned to the Inzu Ya Masaba faction insist the mediation must address leadership legitimacy.

Their counsel Eddie Nangulu said progress depends on recognition of their concerns, including formal commitment to the process by Umukuka Mudoma. “We also want restoration of Inzu Ya Masaba as the legitimate cultural institution, reinstatement of the cultural constitution, and rebuilding of leadership structures,” Davis Wakane, an elder, said.