

THE CURRICULUM ON ENVIRONMENT CRIME WILL BE TAUGHT TO POLICE INVESTIGATORS AND PROSECUTORS

By Pascal Kwesiga

With environmental crime on the rise, but few cases being successfully prosecuted, the UN has launched an effort to develop a curriculum to retool African police investigators and prosecutors to investigate and prosecute environment-related cases.

The UN believes that a curriculum for police academies and prosecutor training institutes in Africa will create a pool of investigators and prosecutors in environmental crime, and the effort will result in improved prosecutions and investigations of cases involving illegal exploitation of natural resources.

Yesterday, the UN held its maiden forum for police and prosecutors from 24 African countries on environmental crime education at Imperial Resort Beach Hotel in Entebbe as part of the continental effort to make (environmental crime) an integral part of prosecution and administration of justice infrastructure.

The Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Oulanyah, who opened the forum, noted that training programmes for police investigators and prosecutors are deficient in environmental education, and welcomed the UN's move to retool (investigators and prosecutions) in probing and prosecuting crimes against the environment.

"The reality is so glaring

Environment crime: UN to develop curriculum for police



(Left to right, seated) The President of Africa Prosecutors Associations, Dr. Helder Fernando Pitta of Angola, DPP Justice Chibita, Deputy Speaker Jacob Oulanyah and Elizabeth Maruma, UN environment director at the Regional Forum for Police and Prosecutors on Environmental Crime in Entebbe, yesterday. Photo by Abou Kisige

that you have to be stubborn to ignore it. I have seen rivers dry. The drought is becoming more severe and frequent. This is an issue of human survival," he added.

While Uganda has established a robust institutional and legal framework, pronouncing that

everyone has a right to a clean environment, Oulanyah said, in practice, the story is different.

"You, police and prosecutors have a big task. And do not go for small people committing small environmental crimes like littering the streets. Deal with the institutions that are

supposed to enforce the law," he stated.

Elizabeth Maruma, the director at the law division of the UN environment, said the development of a sustainable training programme for the African police and prosecutors is already underway. But the

UN has not set any timelines within which the curriculum for police and prosecutors would be ready.

"Environmental crime is threatening and hindering our livelihoods, jobs, revenue and has continually become a stumbling block to our

efforts to achieve sustainable development and importantly eradicating poverty in Africa," Maruma added.

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Mike Chibita, said it is important to integrate the teaching of environmental criminal law into the curricula of training institutes of the Police and prosecutors to get them retrained and skilled in an area that is increasingly becoming an integral part of the justice administration system.

"A well-trained and skilled police and prosecutorial units are essential in the success of the fight against environment crimes in Africa," he explained.

Chibita said Makerere University has environmental law as a course unit for undergraduate law students. However, its scope is narrow and is theoretical, leaving the learners with skills gaps in dealing with cases involving illegal and selfish exploitation of natural resources by a criminal syndicate at the expense of the majority.

"DPP relies on investigations by the Police who send reports to the (DPP) for advice before prosecution. But the Police and the DPP are staffed with university graduates with knowledge gaps in environment crime. This intervention by the UN is good, and if we had our way, we would have environmental training starting from primary schools," he added.