Hundreds attend rights conference

By Vivian Agaba

Hundreds of people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, turned up for the first Muslim Human Rights Conference on Tuesday at Hotel Africana in Kampala.

The conference, which is aimed at building momentum for the celebrations of the Human Rights Day that is celebrated on December 10, every year, will be an annual event.

It is aimed at increasing networking and collaboration between the Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL), a Muslim civil society, and other human rights stakeholders in Uganda.

The guest of honour, Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga, hailed the organisers of the conference for the event, noting that it is a major step towards promoting and protecting human rights in Uganda.

In her speech delivered by the state minister of tourism and antiquities, Godfrey Kiwanda Suubi, Kadaga acknowledged the commendable services offered by MCJL in complementing the Government's efforts in promoting human rights, as well as enhancing access to justice for the needy, vulnerable and marginalised persons through a faith-based approach.

Participants at the conference included representatives of development partners, diplomatic corps, heads of human rights organisations and networks in Uganda.

Others were religious leaders, Members of Parliament, the academia, representatives from the private sector, media practitioners and government officials from the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS).

During the discussions, participants raised key human rights issues, which included the growing fear among Muslims that they are being targeted by security agencies, not because they are suspected extremists, but because of their faith.



Mayanja receiving an award from Kiwanda Ssubi

Police spokesperson Emilian Kayima responded to some of the concerns raised, especially in regard to the Police force.

He also encouraged Muslims to report all incidents in which their rights are violated or threatened, as well as the perpetrators.

The president of MCJL, Jaffer Senganda, reassured participants that the organisation would continue offering free legal aid to Ugandans in areas where it is operating.

During the conference, MCJL recognised various human rights defenders and inspirational personalities with special awards.

There were four categories: the Overall Human Rights Award, the Inspirational People's Award, the Community Excellence Award and the Media Excellence Award.

The overall Human Rights Award went to Counsel Ladislaus Rwakafuzi. He was recognised for his extra-ordinary commitment and achievement in defending human rights in Uganda.

The inspirational people's award went to Lawyer Mayanja Twaha, Margaret Sekagya, Haji Nsereko Mutumba, Dr Zahara Nampewo, Justice Moses Mukiibi, MP Latif Ssebaggala and Dr Livingstone Sewanyana.

The Community Excellence Award was awarded to the US Embassy in Kampala, Trocaire, The Democratic Governance Facility, Uganda Muslim Youth Assembly, Legal Aid Service Providers Network and JLOS.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

The Muslim Human Rights Conference aims to increase collaboration between the Muslim Centre for Justice and Law and other human rights stakeholders in Uganda.

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