

# **PRESIDENT'S REMARKS AT THE NETPIL RAPID LEGAL RESPONSE AND EMERGENCY SUPPORT POLICY EVENT AT GOLDEN TULIP HOTEL ON 18<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2020**

***Theme: "Promoting Freedom of Expression, Rule of Law and Access to Justice Uganda"***

## **Protocol**

### **Introduction**

- I am honored to stand before you on this important day as we craft a pathway for ensuring faster provision of justice to those in much need of it. I extend warm regards from the Bar and the Council of the society.
- There isn't a duty more noble than one of that person who is going to deliver justice to a person in need of it. These are our today heroes. I believe that as a lawyer in execution of our duty we are soldiers on a mission and have an obligation to the public but most importantly to that client in need of it.

### **Access to Justice**

- **George S. Patton Jr rightly states that, "It is a proud privilege to be a soldier - a good soldier ... [with] discipline, self-respect, pride in his unit and his country, a high sense of duty and obligation to comrades and to his superiors, and a self-confidence born of demonstrated ability."**
- Human rights are important, but cannot be effective without the mechanisms and foot soldiers to run to the aid of a violation that is being committed at given time. I believe that this is where an initiative like this Rapid Legal Response comes in.
- I understand it to have come at a time that is crucial where the human rights violations don't discriminate as to who they can befall. This year alone unlike the previous ones, we have seen various victims in need of legal aid who could not access services due to the prevailing circumstances.
- Worse still, the service providers that were available and willing to provide the said services had not been considered as essential service providers. While those who tried to act out of their way to help these

victims were victimized themselves hence having their rights violated even as they tried to do their professional duty.

- This has been a saddening site to view especially in light of how crucial legal services were needed during the lockdown period. It forced our hand to speak out against such outrageous acts that frustrate the pursuit of the much desired legal aid.
- As Uganda Law Society, we further put up a hotline for advocates in need of assistance to help our own from victimization while on duty. Additionally, this opened up a real topic of discussion in regard to the human rights defenders vis a vis the way law enforcement handles them while doing their job. I believe as NETPIL has crafted this Rapid Legal Response and Emergency Support, these stand as some of the challenges such a unit that seeks to provide justice will find.
- Therefore, as much as I applaud this initiative, I call upon you to lean on us anytime you experience challenges in this mandate. For if we don't stick together to fight for access to justice as our mandate requires, then who will.

### **Way forward**

- The other very critical issue which is interlinked with this above is the lack of an express statute to back up these fighters which leaves them essentially legally naked to violations of every nature. In Uganda, for instance we now have the Human Rights Enforcement Act, 2019 which tries to tackle this issue though in an indirect manner.
- I believe that, through this, victims of abuse especially media practitioners and human rights defenders have access to legal aid services supported by the newly established rapid response fund under the rapid and response policy and the backing of the law. This law coupled with the Chapter 4 of our Constitution, I believe can do wonders but more statutes need to empower our fellow fighters to have a clear stand on issues and also create pathways for access to justice.
- I am confident that all that needs to be done is channeling our efforts to ensure that we experience the similar protection we often want to see others enjoy. I therefore applaud NETPIL for such a thoughtful and future vision initiative that will see more given back to society.

### **Conclusion**

- **In the words of Desmond Tutu, “It means a great deal to those who are oppressed to know that they are not alone. Never let anyone tell you that what you are doing is insignificant.”**
- My appeal to all of us is that we obtain a sustainable solution to this ever growing problem to avoid future challenges and absurdities such as the one we experienced recently. We are a bar profession that is strict in principle, teachable and adaptable to the ever changing atmosphere, and ready to serve the public in our mandate. I commend your efforts on this policy and I look forward to seeing it create a practical quick solution to our justice challenges.

Thank you and I wish all of us good deliberations.

**PHEONA NABASA WALL**

**PRESIDENT**