



UGANDA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Press Release

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+++++For Immediate Release+++++

Uganda Human Rights Commission Chairperson tours Karamoja sub-region

The Chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) Mr Med Kagwa last week toured Karamoja sub-region to acquaint himself with the human rights situation in the region. The week-long trip of the Chairperson and other UHRC officials including Mr Kamadi Byonabye the Director in charge of regional services began on Sunday August 14, 2016. They visited Moroto, Kotido, Nakapiripirit and Kaabong districts.

The Chairperson and his team visited and interacted with various stakeholders especially those in the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) based in the different districts in the Karamoja sub-region. They engaged with District Police Commanders, Uganda Prison Services officials, Resident State Attorneys, the Magistrates Grade 1 in Kaabong and Nakapiripirit districts and Chief Magistrates in Kotido and Moroto districts. In Moroto they held discussions with officials of the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, the UN Human Rights, Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) and Local Council V officials. The UHRC team also visited the Justice 4 Children civil society organization operating in Karamoja sub-region focusing on children.

Six major emerging human rights issues were identified in the Karamoja sub-region and the community interventions to deal with them. Their impact on the enjoyment of human rights was discussed. These were:

1. The Nabilatuk and Moruitit resolutions used by the communities in Karamoja to deter cattle theft in the region.

The resolutions stipulate the formula of penalties for anyone found with stolen cattle. The culprit suffers imprisonment in addition to giving compensation of two animals to the victim for each one recovered, plus another animal for the community. The resolutions also provide for the transfer of the culpability and liability to family members in case the accused is unable to meet the compensation.

The resolutions which are implemented through joint action by community peace committees were according to the communities reported to have facilitated the quick recovery of stolen animals; eliminated impunity and lawlessness.

However, it was noted that the resolutions had some negative human rights and legal implications. The provision for transfer of liability is implemented through compulsory impounding of animals from suspected kraals. Given the culture of communal ownership among the Karimojong, this affects innocent family members. The resolutions also promote double jeopardy since the culprit pays the stipulated fines and gets imprisoned at the same time.

The UHRC Chairperson promised to review the Nabilatuk and Moruitit resolutions with the Regional Head of the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in Moroto in order to advise the elders to come up with provisions that comply with human rights standards.

2. The widespread problem of alcoholism in Karamoja sub-region

The Chairperson was briefed on the irresponsible consumption of sachet alcohol (waragi) which has allegedly led to increased crime, violations of human rights and eroded morals especially among the young people. It was reported that the high incidence of alcoholism had led to family disintegration arising from domestic violence, assault and child neglect.

3. Negative cultural practices that were still rampant in Karamoja sub-region.

The leaders in Karamoja raised the impact of cultural practices such as child marriages, defilement, denial of girl-child education and the prevalence of female genital mutilation in some communities. The chairperson noted that whereas the Constitution of Uganda provides for the right to culture, it also prohibits cultural practices that violate human rights.

4. The application of the traditional justice system in Karamoja

The traditional justice system provides for an opportunity for culprits to negotiate on any crime committed including capital offences such as murder, rape or defilement. It has enabled culprits to opt for compensation as opposed to imprisonment. UHRC Chairperson noted that the preference for compensation to imprisonment for capital offenders is inconsistent with the law. He pledged increased sensitisation of communities on these issues in collaboration with other JLOS institutions in Karamoja sub-region.

5. The welfare of police personnel in Karamoja

Members of the Uganda Police Force raised concerns of overstaying at stations for periods of up to ten years; non-payment of hardship allowances for the police yet other public servants are paid; and limited promotional opportunities available to them. There were also concerns by Local Administration Police (LAPs) in Kararmoja over the unfair decision that resulted in their being stripped of their ranks and relegated to Police Constables. The Commission promised to raise the issues with the police leadership.

6. Concerns in the extractive industries that operate in Karamoja including the non-participation of communities whenever decisions affecting them in the mining industry are made by the Ministry of Energy, Oil and Mineral Development.

It was noted that this had compromised the principle of free, prior and informed consent of the communities and the constitutional provision that land belongs to the citizens of Uganda. It was also pointed out that the current Mining Act gives excessive powers to the Commissioner in charge of licensing, which have in some instances been misused or unfairly applied. There were reports of exploitation of the local miners by buyers who for example offer a paltry UGX 120,000 for a truck of marble stones which is later sold to Tororo Cement at UGX 4,000,000.

UHRC Chairperson promised to take up the issues raised with the concerned stakeholders to ensure that they are urgently addressed. Noting that some of the issues were as a result of lack of adequate knowledge on the part of the communities in Karamoja sub-region, he pledged that UHRC would team up with other JLOS institutions in the region to carry out sensitisation programmes.

Earlier during the tour of various places and institutions, the UHRC Chairperson observed the notable improvements in Karamoja such as the reduction in the cases of violation of human rights; the good road network linking the different



districts; and the vibrant economic and particularly agricultural activities in the region. The UHRC team also noted that the new infrastructure for police stations and the judiciary such as magistrates' courts in the districts of Moroto, Kotido, Kaabong and Nakapiriprit were some of the good signs of progress in the region. The UHRC team was also gratified to note the peace and calm in the Karamoja sub-region which pointed to the successful disarmament programme carried out by government a few years ago.

Through his interaction with leaders and stakeholders in the various districts, the Chairperson learnt that the visible signs of development in Karamoja sub-region were as a result of the great contribution by the former Minister of Karamoja Affairs Hon Janet Kataaha Museveni. The leaders of Karamoja also acknowledged her for empowering the women in the region and sensitising communities to embrace the practice of demanding for accountability from their leaders on government projects, which they said had now taken root in the region.

Speaking during a radio programme on Nenah FM in Moroto, the UHRC Chairperson lauded the great work of the First Lady Hon. Janet Museveni in transforming the Karamoja sub-region through her able leadership during her tenure as Minister in charge of Karamoja Affairs. He also recognised the support from the Irish Embassy and the European Union whom he was told were the biggest funders of development projects in the sub-region. The Chairperson also commended the good working relationship between the leadership of Karamoja and the UHRC regional office in Moroto and the UHRC Field offices in Nakapiripirit and Kotido. He also hailed the close cooperation between the UHRC Moroto office and the police in Karamoja sub-region. He urged all stakeholders in Karamoja sub-region to carry on with the good work and remain committed partners with UHRC in the protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

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