



PRESS STATEMENT

BY

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**MINISTER OF STATE FOR GENDER LABOUR AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

ON

4th March 2026

VENUE: UGANDA MEDIA CENTRE, KAMPALA

Members of the press, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to address you today on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Uganda ahead of the commemoration of International Women's Day 2026, which will take place on 8th March 2026 at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds.

International Women's Day is a globally recognised moment to reflect on the status of women, to celebrate progress made, and most importantly to renew commitment to addressing persistent inequalities that affect women and girls. In Uganda, this Day carries particular significance because women and girls remain central to our social, economic, and cultural fabric, yet continue to experience disproportionate barriers in accessing justice, opportunities, and protection.

The national theme for International Women's Day 2026 is ***"Scaling up Investments to Accelerate Access to Justice for all Women and Girls in Uganda."*** This theme is deliberate, timely, and anchored in the realities facing Ugandan women and girls today.

Access to justice is not an abstract concept. It determines whether a survivor of gender-based violence is protected or silenced; whether a widow retains her land or is dispossessed; whether a girl remains in school or is forced into early marriage; and whether women can claim their economic and social rights without fear or discrimination. Justice is therefore foundational to equality, development, and social cohesion.

In terms of access to justice, according to the court census report released by the Judiciary, Uganda has a sizable case backlog of Gender based violence cases, which have many women and girls as victims of the crime. According to the report GBV case backlog makes up 32.42% of the total with (3,636) being cases of Defilement and 29.39% (3,296) being Aggravated Defilement. The High court has 4,888 pending cases with 1,818 of those being in the system for more than two years (backlog). At Chief Magistrates' level, there are 4,816

GBV cases with 865 being backlog. Like the saying goes Justice delayed is justice denied.

Economic hardships and dependency, distance, lack of witness protection laws and limited legal literacy are significant barriers to women accessing justice and often push them toward informal mechanisms in their communities. Yet, these systems are characterized by patriarchal biases and unequal power dynamics that limit women's ability to access justice and breed impunity

Uganda has made notable progress over the years. Women today participate more actively in leadership, education, and economic production than ever before. For instance, Government has financed 21,948 women group enterprises, benefitting 235,114 women under the UWEP programme. In the fiscal year 2024/2025, a total of 24,228 youth enterprises were funded to the tune of Shs. 191.336 billion, benefitting 271,211 youth whom at least 30% were female. In the current 11th Parliament of Uganda, Women constitute 34.5% whereas Women Ministers comprise 45%. In the Local Governments, 45.7% are women in leadership. The Universal Primary and Secondary education have increased milestones in girl education. Government has enacted and reviewed laws aimed at protecting women and girls, strengthened institutions within the justice sector, and expanded programmes that support women's economic empowerment. These gains must be acknowledged.

Government has progressed well on promoting women and girl's access to justice despite some challenges that are still impeding full access. The Government of Uganda has put in place several institutions that are mandated to promote gender equality in access to justice including the Gender and Children Desks within the Uganda Police Force across the country; Gender, Children and Sexual Offences Department at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP); Gender Focal Judge at the Judiciary; and the Family and Children Courts that use gender-sensitive and child friendly procedures in adjudication of cases. The above efforts are to

ensure coordinated and expeditious approaches in dealing with cases involving women and girls.

Despite the progress made, women and girls continue to face systemic and structural barriers across the justice chain from reporting violations, to investigation, prosecution, adjudication, and enforcement of decisions. Gender-based violence remains widespread. Case backlogs, especially for defilement and aggravated defilement, persist within the courts, save for the many cases that are not proceeded with, due to lack of sufficient evidence, with the burden of proof resting on the victim. Economic constraints, limited legal awareness, harmful social norms, and patriarchal practices continue to undermine women's ability to seek redress.

For many women, justice remains slow, costly, intimidating, or simply out of reach.

It is for this reason that this year's theme calls for scaled-up investment not only in financial terms, but also in institutional capacity, human resources, infrastructure, technology, and community-level gender-based violence prevention and response mechanisms. Justice systems cannot function effectively without adequate investment, coordination, and political will.

Government has already taken concrete steps in this direction. We have strengthened Gender and Children Desks within the Uganda Police Force, enhanced prosecution of gender-based crimes through specialised units in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and supported the Judiciary to introduce innovations aimed at reducing case backlog, including alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, electronic case management systems, and virtual court sessions.

We have invested in survivor-centered approaches that prioritize dignity, confidentiality, and protection of victims and witnesses. We have expanded access to legal aid and community-based justice services, particularly for vulnerable populations including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

In parallel, Government continues to address the economic dimensions of justice. Women's access to economic resources, livelihoods, and financial independence is a critical determinant of their ability to escape violence and assert their rights. Through national programmes such as the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme, Youth Livelihood Programme, Parish Development Model, Emyooga, and targeted social protection interventions, Government is deliberately investing in women's economic empowerment as a pathway to justice and equality.

These efforts align with Uganda's constitutional commitments, national development priorities under the Fourth National Development Plan, and international obligations, including the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Yet, Government alone cannot deliver justice for all.

Achieving meaningful and lasting change requires collective action. It requires collaboration across justice sector institutions, local governments, civil society, cultural and religious institutions, the private sector, development partners, and communities themselves. Harmful social norms must be confronted. Silence and stigma must be broken. Survivors must be supported not blamed.

As we approach International Women's Day 2026, I call upon all Ugandans to actively participate in this national moment. Let us use this commemoration to reaffirm our shared responsibility to protect the rights of women and girls, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to ensure that justice systems serve those most in need.

I wish to formally invite the general public, women's organisations, youth groups, cultural leaders, academia, and development partners to join Government at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds on 8th March 2026 as we commemorate this important day, H.E. The President Y.K. Museveni will be the Chief Guest.

I also extend a special invitation to members of the media to engage with us throughout the International Women's Day activities. The

media remains a critical partner in shaping public discourse, amplifying women's voices, and promoting accountability. Your role in informing, educating, and mobilizing the public cannot be overstated.

As I conclude, let me emphasize that access to justice for women and girls is not optional, it is a constitutional imperative, a développement necessity, and a moral obligation. Scaling up investment in justice systems is an investment in Uganda's future, stability, and prosperity.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development remains committed to providing leadership, coordination, and oversight in advancing gender equality and justice for all. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure that no woman and no girl is left behind.

I thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your active participation as we commemorate International Women's Day 2026.



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