



SOUTHERN AFRICAN CHIEF JUSTICES FORUM

SAJC Conference on "Modernising the Judiciary" (Entebbe, Uganda, 4-5 February 2005)

SPEECH BY THE RT. HON. JUSTICE BENJAMIN J ODOKI, CHIEF JUSTICE OF UGANDA, AT THE OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN JUDGES COMMISSION, HELD AT IMPERIAL RESORT BEACH HOTEL, ENTEBBE, UGANDA ON 4TH FEBRUARY 2005 AT 9:30 A.M.

The Guest of Honour, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Uganda, Prof. Apolo Nsibambi,

Rt. Hon. Justice Arthur Chaskalson, Chief Justice of South Africa, and Chairperson, Southern African Judges Commission,

Rt. Hon. Chief Justices from the Southern African Region,

Hon. Ag. Deputy Chief Justice,

Hon. Principal Judge,

Hon. Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs/Attorney General,

My Lords, Justices and Judges of the Courts of Judicature in Uganda,

The Secretary General of the Venice Commission,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It give me great pleasure to warmly welcome the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister to this function and to express our gratitude that he has found time in his busy schedule to come and open this conference.

May I, in the same vein, welcome the Hon. Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs/Attorney General, and congratulate him on his recent appointment to the Ministry.

I should like to take this opportunity to extend a special welcome to Honourable Chief Justices and other participants who come from the countries, which comprise the Southern African Judges Commission. The ten countries represented by their Chief Justices are Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Seychelles, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

May I also welcome the Secretary General of the Venice Commission, Council of Europe, Mr. Gianni Buquicchio and the Head of the Constitutional Justice Division, Mr. Schutz Durr and to thank them for co-funding the Conference.

The Southern African Judges Commission was set up in December 2003, comprising 14 Member Countries with a membership of incumbent Chief Justices or equivalent officers and their successors, in designated countries. The headquarters of the Commission is situated in South Africa.

The objectives of the Commission include: to promote contact and cooperation among the courts in the Southern African region; to promote the rule of law, democracy and the independence of the courts in the Region; to promote and protect the welfare and dignity of Judges in the region; to establish a website at which judgments of the highest courts in the region are collected; to promote assistance to courts and promote cooperation among judicial training institutions; and to encourage the

publication and dissemination of judgments of the Supreme Courts and the use of information technology.

The theme of the conference "Modernising the Judiciary" is intended to promote the declared objectives of the Commission. Indeed during the conference, the Commission will discuss the topic of the "Role of Information Technology in Modernising Judicial Systems." The following day the Commission will discuss "Challenges in Establishing Judicial Training Institute." Both these two topics are key to improving justice delivery in our courts and in facilitating communication, cooperation and coordination in the region.

The theme of this conference is also a pertinent at this crucial time when the demands on judiciaries are increasing to provide an enabling legal environment for stable political orders and rapid economic reconstruction and transformation. The improvement of judicial systems for efficient and effective delivery of justice should be a major priority for our countries. We must transform our judiciaries by changing the way we work, by improving technology, working harder and enhancing skills.

The Southern African Judges Commission is unique and important organisation, which is intended to promote strong dynamic and effective judicial leadership in the region. It will play a key role in promoting and defending the independence of the judiciary, the rule of law and the improvement in the delivery of justice to the people, as a measure of promoting judicial accountability.

During the conference, the Rt. Hon. Chief Justice of South Africa has accepted to launch my book just published, entitled "The Search for a National Consensus", written about the making of the 1995 Constitution. Constitutions are important because they guarantee the independence of the judiciary and fundamental human rights, and institutionalise democracy, among other things. It is the duty of the Judiciary to safeguard and protect the Constitution.

I am grateful to the Venice Commission and the Uganda Judiciary for the financial support received for organising this conference.

I wish all our distinguished guests fruitful deliberations and an enjoyable stay in Uganda.

I thank you for your attention