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BILINGUAL NEWSLETTER- ENGLISH

**INAUGURAL TRAINING SESSION FOR PEACE AMBASSADORS
AHEAD OF UGANDA'S 2026 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

NEWSLETTER

JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2025

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NEWSLETTER JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2025

**UNITED NATIONS AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRIME
AND THE TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS (UNAFRI)**

"Empowering African States for crime prevention and criminal justice to ensure sustainable development".

"Renforcer la capacité des États africains dans la prévention du crime et la justice pénale pour assurer un développement durable".

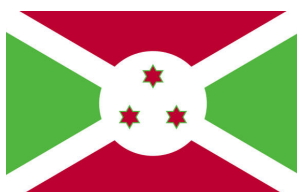
«Fortalecer la capacidad de los Estados africanos en materia de prevención del delito y justicia penal para el desarrollo sostenible»

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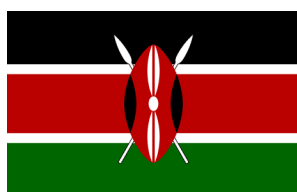
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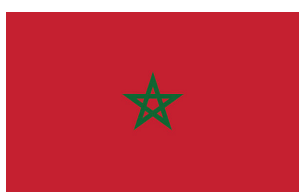
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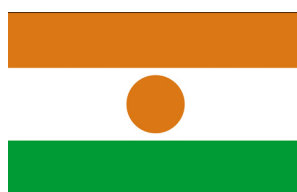
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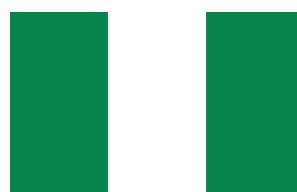
Morocco



Mozambique



Niger



Nigeria



Rwanda



Senegal



Seychelles



Sierra Leone



Somalia



Sudan



Tanzania



Togo



Tunisia



Uganda



Zambia



Zimbabwe

UNAFRI'S 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2025

"Ensuring Equal Access to Justice for All: Advancing Safe and Secure Societies."



UNAFRI Directors during the Conference

On 29 July 2025, the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI), in collaboration with the Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (ILANUD), convened an international online conference via Zoom under the theme: "Ensuring Equal Access to Justice for All: Advancing Safe and Secure Societies." The meeting engaged UNAFRI member states in sharing national experiences, best practices and perspectives as part of the preparatory process for the 15th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to be held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from 25 to 30 April 2026.

OBJECTIVES

The conference aimed to:

Promote Equal Access to Justice by fostering

inclusive legal systems that serve all individuals without discrimination.

Strengthen International Cooperation in crime prevention, justice administration, and the treatment of offenders.

Contribute to Preparations for the 15th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice through knowledge sharing and strategic alignment.

Advance Safe and Secure Societies by addressing emerging threats to peace, stability, and public safety.

Highlight Regional Perspectives to ensure that Africa's priorities and experiences inform global policy dialogues.

Strengthen Policy Frameworks that support effective governance, accountability, and sustainable development.

Encourage Multi-Stakeholder Engagement by bringing together governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector in collective action.

Promote Human Rights and the Rule of Law as fundamental pillars for justice, peace, and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

Dr. Douglas Durán Chavarría, Director of the United Nations Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (ILANUD)

The conference is of great importance as it provides UNAFRI with the opportunity to gather useful information to inform its participation in the workshop for the 2026 Congress in Abu Dhabi. The objective of analysing access to justice issues is framed within the broad context of the Congress to promote crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law to advance the achievement of the 2030 Agenda Goals.

One of the problems that has negatively influenced access to justice is the reduction in citizens' trust in the criminal justice system. This is naturally a situation related to the loss of legitimacy of institutions. This situation causes people to distance themselves from the police, courts, penitentiary systems, and other justice administrative entities. Therefore, any effort that can be made to improve transparency, proper functioning and the openness of institutions toward the public will result in more people approaching the systems of justice administration.

PRESENTATIONS OF MEMBER STATE'S PERSPECTIVES ON ENSURING JUSTICE FOR ALL

UGANDA

Hon. Lady Justice Jane Frances Abodo (Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) of Uganda)

Uganda has made notable strides in expanding legal aid, implementing gender-responsive reforms, and leveraging technology to improve access to justice. The Legal Aid Project assisted over 8,216 individuals in 2024, resolving 1,579 cases through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Additionally, gender-responsive court sessions have increased the conviction rates for GBV cases from less than 20% to over 70%.

Technology initiatives like the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) and Prosecution Case Management System (PROCMS) have digitalised case management, which has reduced backlogs and facilitated remote hearings. The plea bargain system has also resolved 45,000 cases, reducing prison overcrowding by 20%.

To enhance access to justice, Uganda must expand legal aid clinics to underserved regions and implement mobile legal aid units, invest in digital infrastructure and subsidise data costs to improve access to online legal services, as well as standardise data collection to enable targeted interventions for vulnerable groups.

ZAMBIA

Mr. Vanny Hampondela (Monitoring, Evaluation, and APRM National Coordinator)

Zambia has made efforts to ensure equal access to justice through constitutional guarantees, legislative reforms, and integration into national development planning. Various laws have been enacted to enhance access to justice even for vulnerable populations, such as the Persons with Disabilities Act (2012), Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015), and Children's Code Act (2022). These laws are informed by national policies such as the National Gender Policy

(2014) and National Legal Aid Policy (2018).

Domestic violence, violent crimes, economic crimes, and organised crime are among the common and prevalent crimes, caused by poverty and unemployment. Zambia has made significant strides in implementing the Access to Justice Programme through reforms such as the establishment of specialised courts like the Economic and Financial Crimes Court, as well as the establishment of One-Stop Centres which provide comprehensive support for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

GHANA

Ms. Stella Ohene Appiah (Chief State Attorney)

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees fundamental human rights, equality before the law, and the right to a fair trial. Legal aid is provided for those unable to afford representation, as stipulated in Article 294. The country has taken pragmatic steps to ensure that all criminal justice is available for all.

The Justice for All Programme (JFAP) aims to improve access to justice for pre-trial detained by facilitating court hearings within prisons. This has resulted in decongesting prisons and detention centres to avoid overcrowding. In 2022, JFAP addressed 59 cases, resulting in 3 discharges and 24 bail grants. In 2024, 24 cases were heard, leading to 11 discharges and 8 bail grants.

Additionally, a High Court operates within Nsawam Prison for expedited bail applications, and a circuit court addresses domestic violence cases at the CID Headquarters. The increased lower court presence across districts enhances early access to justice.

KENYA

Mr. Kennedy Mutiso (Principal State Counsel and a Senior Technical Legal Advisor to the Principal

Secretary State Department for Justice Human Rights and Constitutional Affairs)

Kenya embraces the theme of the 2026 Congress that recognizes that equal access to justice is foundation of safe, secure and lawful societies. The Kenyan Constitution of 2010 enshrines access to justice as a fundamental right and mandates that state action to remove barriers especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

In Kenya, the Legal Aid Act, together with a robust Alternative Justice System (AJS) policy and multi sectoral coordination through the National Council on Administration of Justice are significant.

We have embraced legal aid and public legal empowerment where Kenya has institutionalized state funded legal aid through the National Legal Aid Service and, a county level rollout has ensured that access in hard-to-reach areas is simplified.

We are also in the process of developing a curriculum for state legal aid counsel, ensuring quality, consistency and ethical service delivery. This is being spearheaded by the Office of Attorney General where State Counsel will be giving the much-needed services to the vulnerable and indigent around Kenya.

Kenya has leveraged on technology through the e-filing and virtual court system. Our judiciary has really taken key interest and has embraced technology in matters of access to justice. This reduces the time in terms of adjournments thus matters are heard on time.

The Attorney General has embraced a digital legal aid portal whereby any person can access legal services at the comfort of their home in real time. So, this enables and has improved the access to justice in Kenya.

We also have AI-case tracking and mobile platforms to improve outreach. These AI assisted case tracking systems are in place and assist to improve outreach to people. And they are regularized by an AI policy that has been launched recently by our ICT Ministry.

TANZANIA

Mr. Msham Abdulrahman (Director of Public Legal Services at the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania)

The Tanzanian Constitution of 1977 as amended ensures a national dedication to justice and equality. The Bill of Rights entrenched in our Constitution guarantees fundamental rights including equality before the law, the right to be heard, protection of life and liberty, and the prohibition of discrimination.

Tanzania continues to invest in a legal aid service through the Legal Aid Act Cap. 21 which was enacted in 2017. The government has formalized legal aid provision ensuring that vulnerable and marginalized group with special women, children, persons with disability and the indigent can access competent legal representation and advice.

The Government, through our Ministry has launched the “Mama Samiya Legal Aid Campaign” which is very popular. In this campaign, the government is ensuring every citizen in the United Republic of Tanzania can access justice and have legal representation. 4,165,000 people have benefitted from this and are now fully aware of our legal system in Tanzania.

Tanzania has undertaken the digitalization of court processes to reduce case backlog and the decentralize judicial service to rural and pre urban areas. This has helped us to do away with a case backlog and make access to justice to our

communities.

Another area is capacity building for judicial officers which continues to enhance transparency, efficiency and public confidence. In the judiciary example, there is the formation of justice integrated centers in the country.

Tanzania has established a mobile court. We have an assist team in which this court moves from one place to another. This methodology has helped citizens to access justice easily. The National Commission for Criminal Justice has also been established. This inter-agency body promotes dialogue, coherence and reform in law enforcement, prosecution, and correctional service.

SEYCHELLES

Mr. George Thachett (Principal State Counsel in the Attorney General’s Office, Heading the Criminal Prosecution Unit)

The Constitution of Seychelles (1993) specifically provides for the right to a fair hearing and legal representation under Article 19. We have a very active and strong ombudsman and human rights commission which ensures access to justice with a robust legal aid system.

Mobile courts are available even for those who are on other islands. Magistrates’ courts go there periodically and dispose of the matters. In that way, access to justice is guaranteed to almost all the population.

The Attorney General provides advice to various ministries departments as well as support capacity building to various like for various community-based projects. We engage in enhancing legal awareness among the people.

The Judiciary has also introduced many programs into their system, especially the Computerised Case Administration System (CAS) system to

enhance efficiency and transparency which helps a lot in reducing the backlog.

NIGERIA

Mr. Olubnumi Ikupolati (Assistant Director for International Criminal Justice in the International Cooperation Department in the Federal Ministry of Justice in Nigeria)

Ensuring equal access to justice has been a continuous effort. In 2015, the Administration of Criminal Justice (ACJ) Act was passed, aiming at ensuring that there is equal access to justice for all through fast tracking of criminal cases in court so that there is no case backlog.

Nigeria also has the Legal Aid Council which provides free legal services for indigent people. The Federal Ministry of Justice, under the auspices of the Attorney General of the Federation, has two specialized departments that cater for vulnerable groups in ensuring that they get justice. One of these departments is the Citizens Rights Department which provides free legal advice and representation for indigent people in society.

Additionally, the Sexual Gender-based Violence Department caters for the right of people harassed sexually, majorly women and children, in trying to assert their rights. In recent times much success has been recorded in this department with a lot of convictions.

There is fast dispensation of justice in all courts, since most of the courts are now digitalized. Distance does not hinder one from having their case heard in court. In regard to the vulnerable groups, the Disability Act was recently passed and signed into law. This is to enable persons with disabilities, to have speedy and easy access to justice. A lot of barriers on their way were eliminated by this Act.

LIBYA

Mr. Mohamed Taimour Abdel Akher bin Aliwa (Head of the Legislation Department at the Ministry of Justice)

In Libya, we are working under the regional and international framework to fight crime and promote the rule of law. The judiciary has developed punishment policies focusing on community reintegration and reform especially for the youth, women and underaged.

One of the initiatives is the educational center which was opened to rehabilitate women. The women there through the developing their skills through sewing and political engagement for the less minority people.

A campaign was conducted to represent women more and to give them the opportunity with 30% of governmental jobs being given to women. The youth and women have also been empowered through community campaigns, judicial and institutional reform as well and the national plans for social justice.

A cooperation project has been conducted since 2004 with the Libyan Government for creating a reform plan, training the staff and developing the curriculum and vocational education to assist the women. For example, in Tripoli, a vocational training was conducted which was an emotional support for women.

SUMMARY OF THE C5-UNAFRI-2025 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

UNAFRI hosted its fifth online international conference via Zoom on 29th July 2025, bringing together Prosecutors, Lawyers, and Heads of Legal Institutions from different member states, who shared their perspectives in relation to access to Justice for all in their respective countries.

JUSTICE BEYOND BORDERS: ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE GREATER HORN OF AFRICA



Mr. Munanura Andrew Karokora, the Deputy Director General of the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI), represented the Institute at the Regional Gender Forum, organised by the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda) in partnership with the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA).

This was held on 28 August 2025 at the Serena Hotel, Kampala, under the theme, *“Justice Beyond Borders: Regional Mechanisms and Women’s Rights in the Greater Horn of Africa.”* It brought together leading voices from across the region to deliberate on strengthening gender equality and justice.

OBJECTIVES

The forum aimed to:

Advance women’s rights through African human rights mechanisms.

Encourage adoption and implementation of treaties and protocols on gender equality.

Build the capacity of women’s rights advocates.

Foster cooperation, dialogue, and accountability across the region.

PARTICIPATION

Stakeholders included women judges, senior lawyers, human rights advocates, leaders of women’s movements, representatives of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the African Court, the AU Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, officials from Uganda’s Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Gender, national human rights institutions, development partners, and international organisations.

HIGHLIGHTS

Opening Session: Ambassador Mugerwa, representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officially opened the forum. Lady Justice Susan Okalany, Chair of FIDA Uganda, stressed the significance of the Maputo Protocol, urging stronger action to close implementation gaps.

Key Presentations:

Ms. Hala Al-Karib (SIHA) highlighted regional

collaboration and the role of grassroots women's movements.

Margaret Ajok (Ministry of Justice, Uganda) advocated for transitional justice that includes reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Ms. Esther Waweru (Women's Rights Advocate) shared how regional instruments support accountability and women's movements in host countries.

Esger Muigai-Mnaro (Pan African Lawyers Union) examined challenges to the Maputo Protocol, urging renewed advocacy for its ratification and

enforcement.

Closing Session: Dr. Angella Nakafeero, Commissioner at the Ministry of Gender, reaffirmed Uganda's commitment to gender equality and underscored the importance of working with regional institutions.

Outcomes

The forum provided a valuable platform for networking, learning, and collective strategizing. Participants called for urgent action to domesticate and enforce regional women's rights instruments and to strengthen accountability at all levels.



STATE HOUSE ANTI-CORRUPTION DELEGATION EXPLORES PARTNERSHIP WITH UNAFRI



From left to right, Mr. Munanura Andrew (DDG UNAFRI), Ms. Rebecca Atwiine (SPA), Dr. Kitio Édouard (DG UNAFRI) & Mr. Joel Jerry Walyono (OSPA) and Ms. Faith Nandago (OSPA)

On 9 September 2025, a high-level delegation from the Office of the Special Presidential Assistant on Anti-Corruption at State House paid a courtesy visit to the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) Headquarters in Naguru, Kampala.

The delegation, led by **Ms. Rebecca Atwiine** and accompanied by **Mr. Joel Jerry Walyono** and **Ms. Faith Nandago**, held constructive discussions with the Director General and UNAFRI's senior leadership. The meeting explored strategic areas of cooperation to strengthen the fight against corruption at both national and regional levels.

KEY AREAS OF FOCUS INCLUDED:

Capacity building and specialised training for anti-corruption stakeholders.

Joint research and knowledge exchange on best practices in governance and accountability.

Promotion of international collaboration to curb corruption and enhance justice systems.

Delivering the message of appreciation from the Head of State, Ms. Atwiine thanked UNAFRI for its continued contributions to Uganda's criminal justice sector and reaffirmed the government's



support for stronger partnerships in the anti-corruption drive.

Both institutions expressed optimism about advancing collaboration, stressing the importance of combining expertise and resources to tackle corruption more effectively. The courtesy call also underscored the government's commitment to building institutional alliances, enhancing professional skills, and fostering accountability in public service.

Further engagements between the State House Anti-Corruption Unit and UNAFRI are planned in

the coming months, with the aim of developing joint action plans that will deliver tangible results in the pursuit of a corruption-free society.



SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

By SIMALI Baldric Elijah – Legal Intern at UNAFRI



Fig (1), Southern Africa: A regional response to smuggling of migrants from www.unodc.org

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines migrant smuggling as the facilitation, for financial or other material gain, of irregular entry into a country where the migrant is not a national or resident. According to the United Nations Consultancy titled, “Mapping and Analysis of law enforcement responses and legislation in relation to the smuggling of migrants in Malawi,” migrant smuggling in Southern Africa is increasingly linked to organised crime and more violent and explosive measures against migrants. In 2016, UNODC and the Secretariat of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) partnered in organising the first-ever regional meeting to discuss the challenge that the region faces in addressing the growing problem of migrant smuggling, held from 10th to 12th May. The workshop provided a much-needed platform to fill information gaps around migrant smuggling in the SADC region and enabled SADC Member States to jointly map a way forward in tackling this challenge

in line with the requirements of the United Nations Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. This article analyses the crime of migrant smuggling in the Southern African region.

MALAWI

According to the Consultancy (supra), in 2017, 11 Malawians died in an accident in Tsangano, just inside Mozambique’s border with Malawi, and in 2016, a van transporting 57 children from Malawi was intercepted by South African authorities in a case of migrant smuggling. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) supported the Malawian authorities in reunifying the children with their families in Malawi. Despite these tragic incidents, there is a significant lack of information in Malawi regarding migrant smuggling. According to the Malawian draft National Migration Policy, there are several cases of migrants being smuggled from or through Malawi. The IOM-supported Malawi Migration Profile (2014) recognises that there is a rising concern about the irregular flows of immigrants into the country.

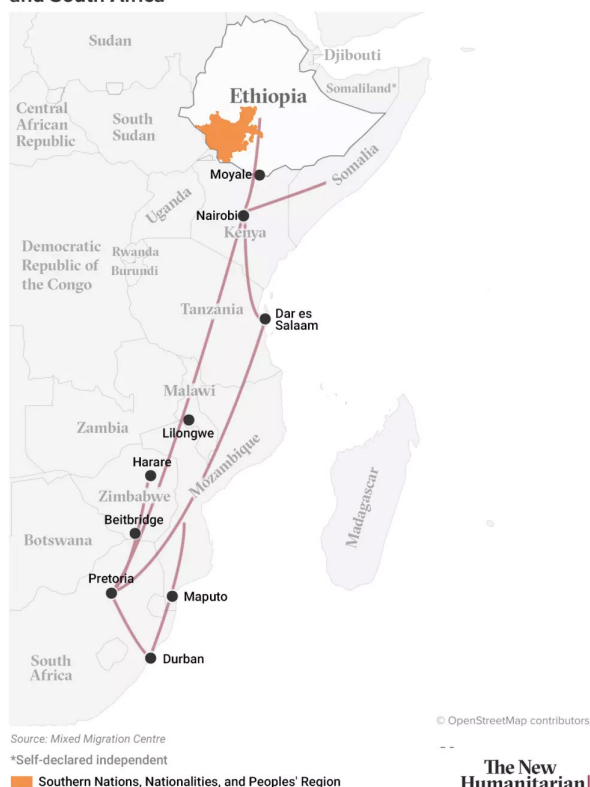
A publication by the Platform for Investigative Journalism dated 1 March 2025 notes that an Ethiopian human smuggling syndicate has embedded itself deep within Malawi's government, creating a vast network of enablers that facilitate a brutal and dangerous passage of desperate migrants who want to flee from war and poverty in Ethiopia to the promise of a better life in other countries, including South Africa. The investigation reveals that this system of trafficking operated primarily out of the Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi, home to approximately 53,000 refugees from conflict-ridden regions such as the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, with gang leaders profiting from and running this system not only co-opting senior government officials, including police and immigration officers to help ensure easier passage for the migrants, but certain cabinet ministers also look the other way and make the necessary interventions in return for

South through Kenya and Tanzania before finally reaching Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Dowa through Malawi's Northern border with Tanzania. To evade detection from law enforcement, traffickers force migrants to travel at night, sleep in forests, cross near-flooded rivers, or sail on Lake Malawi in unsafe boats. Some migrants succumb to illness and exhaustion. The weak and sick are discarded, usually left to die or murdered, and this was revealed in 2012 when mass graves of migrants were discovered and when a boat capsized on Lake Malawi, claiming 47 lives.

One key border crossing point from Tanzania into Malawi is Katininda on the Songwe River, less than 2 km from the Songwe border point. During the day, businesspeople also use this crossing point to dodge paying border taxes for goods, and while motorcycle taxis on either side of the border transport goods in broad daylight, humans are transported across the Songwe River on canoes operated by the locals. At night, the Songwe border crossing is where migrant smugglers from Tanzania hand the migrants over to Malawi-based gangs. Once canoed into Malawi, the migrants are sheltered either in a safe house or hidden in the nearby Ngana Mountain Forest while the smugglers plot a route to take them to Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Central Malawi.

From the Songwe border, they are driven to Karonga Boma via Toyota Sientas, a popular commuter mode of transport in the area, or cargo vans, a more secure but expensive option. Before reaching the Boma and eventually Dzaleka Refugee Camp, they navigate numerous hurdles in the form of police and military checkpoints. According to INUA Advocacy, between 100 and 300 smuggled Ethiopians reportedly pass through the camp weekly, with traffickers demanding between US\$ 5,000 and US\$ 7,000 from the relatives of each trafficked person. INUA Advocacy further estimates that 95% of all Ethiopian nationals registered as either asylum seekers or refugees in Malawi are involved in trafficking and smuggling, with officials in the Ministry of Homeland Security either fully aware of or benefiting financially from the gangs' activities.

Migration routes between East and the Horn of Africa and South Africa



lucrative protection money.

The publication reports that migrants are smuggled mostly from the Hosaena region of Ethiopia, tracking

According to the March 2017 Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) Briefing Paper 3: Smuggled South, the growing labour opportunities in the mining, manufacturing and agricultural sectors in other parts of the region, such as Malawi, are increasingly being viewed as alternative destinations. It further details that in 2010, one study estimated there were 279,000 irregular migrants in Malawi, with an average of 5,000 entering every year and hundreds being arrested by the authorities. The IOM Malawi Newsletter for Q3 July to September 2023 details that in July, 19 Members of Parliament (MPs) participated in a capacity strengthening workshop on Essentials of Migration Management (EMM 2.0), an IOM's flagship programme with resources and foundational training on migration management. The workshop highlighted the interaction between different thematic areas and built a common understanding of migration with a whole-of-government approach.



MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique is a country of origin, transit, and destination for victims of human trafficking, who are often part of wider mixed migration flows, with children being particularly at risk of sex trafficking in cities with high mobile populations. The internal displaced persons (IDP) situation, caused by the ongoing conflict in the northern province of Cabo Delgado and several natural disasters in 2019 and 2022, has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and created new vulnerabilities for affected people, including the risk of trafficking, according to the UNODC Regional Office for Southern Africa. Tete province, located on the border with Malawi, is a key

transit area of the “Southern Route” used by irregular migrants from the Horn of Africa and beyond, trying to reach South Africa.

IOM Mozambique notes that internal labour migration is on the increase as the economy opens up to extractives and energy companies. With the economy in Mozambique rapidly increasing, it is beginning to experience increased migration flows into the country, particularly in the centre and north, as entry points for transit through Mozambique to South Africa, and as migrants enter to seek work with extractives companies. IOM Mozambique has partnered with various government ministries and institutions under the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MNEC), Interior (MINT), Health (MISAU), Labour (MITRAB), General Prosecutor's Office (PGR), and State Administration (MAE).

According to the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) Risk Bulletin #6 March-April 2020, Mozambican immigration inspectors working on the country's border with Malawi made a grim discovery on 24 March when they found the bodies of 64 Ethiopian migrants in an airtight lorry container, alongside 14 survivors. The men, who originated from Ethiopia, had been smuggled in a truck transiting through Malawi. The 2021 Integral Human Development Migration Profile for Mozambique finds that by mid-year 2020, the total number of international migrants was 338,900, while emigrants were 640,200. The migration trend over a five-year period until 2019 showed a minimal change, with slightly more migrants than immigrants, with a net migration of -25,000. In 2020, approximately 52.1% of immigrants were female, 26.8% were 19 years old and younger, and 3.2% were 65 years or older.

According to the U.S. Department of State 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report for Mozambique, traffickers lure voluntary migrants, especially women and girls from rural areas, from neighbouring countries, such as Malawi, to cities in Mozambique, Eswatini, or South Africa with promises of employment



or education. It further notes that Mozambican boys migrate to Eswatini to wash cars, herd livestock, and sell goods; some subsequently become victims of forced labour. It can be noted that in November 2022, Mozambique sought to adopt a revised draft law which proposed compensation for victims of trafficking in line with the spirit of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol which stipulates procedures to ensure that victims have access to compensation. This proposed compensation mechanism for victims is an innovation drawn from the experiences of other countries, including Egypt, that provide an emolument to enable victims to re-establish their lives.

ZAMBIA

According to the RMMS Briefing Paper (supra), the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report noted that during 2014, an increasing number of Ethiopians, Somalis and Egyptians arrived in Zambia for unknown purposes. Ugandan, Somali, and Zambian nationals, including children, were intercepted while being smuggled through Zambia; it was believed that some might become victims of trafficking upon reaching South Africa. In 2016, the State Department reported that potential trafficking victims from Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria were identified in Zambia and that some migrants who transited Zambia were subjected to forced labour in the construction industry in South Africa by local criminal groups.

According to a 3 September 2023 publication by DW, Zambia is tightening its border controls and plans to, for the first time, employ border guards as the

government grapples with rising instances of illegal migration into the country. Additionally, irregular migration along the route from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa, which traverses Zambia, is often facilitated by an intricate network of smugglers and human traffickers who put the lives of migrants in danger, according to the IOM. In December, the bodies of 27 people, believed to be migrants from Ethiopia, were discovered North of Zambia's capital, Lusaka.

A 7 August 2025 publication by Zambia Monitor reports that Zambia's Department of Immigration arrested 7 suspects and seized 372 passports as it investigated a suspected human smuggling syndicate allegedly operating under the cover of a travel agency. Preliminary findings suggest the syndicate was involved in producing and distributing forged documents, including passports, refugee cards, academic transcripts, and institutional stamps, to facilitate visa applications and identity fraud. In 2020, UNODC in partnership with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Zambia Law Development Commission, convened a five-day retreat in Lusaka to identify gaps in the law relating to the smuggling of migrants. The experts assessed Zambia's legislation in force as a first step towards a comprehensive legal framework on the smuggling of migrants.

It can be emphasised that Zambia, in July 2022, came up with the National Policy on Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Implementation Plan with objectives to: reduce the incidences of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants through, to and from Zambia, by 2030; enhance the capacity of the criminal justice system to investigate, identify, and prosecute human trafficking and smuggling cases effectively and efficiently by 2026; strengthen national capacity to provide protection services and care for victims, witnesses and potential victims of human trafficking by 2030; and strengthen national, regional and international coordination and cooperation, to curb human trafficking and smuggling of migrants by 2025. Furthermore, the government passed the Anti Human Trafficking Amendment

Act and strengthened its border controls. During the 2025 World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, the government launched the 2025-2027 National Action Plan on Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants. It is noted that Zambia recorded 41 cases in 2024 involving 194 victims and 46 suspects.

ZIMBABWE

According to the RMMS Briefing Paper (supra), within Zimbabwe, the Tongogara refugee camp and Nyamapanda region centre are important transit points, where migrants obtain services, generate income and make arrangements for the next stage of the trip. Most of the people who are smuggled across the Limpopo River around Beitbridge are from Zimbabwe itself, although Horn of Africa migrants use this route as well.

The U.S. Department of State 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report for Zimbabwe notes that the government of Zimbabwe formally launched its 2023-2028 Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action and continued awareness-raising campaigns, in coordination with NGOs. It details that Zimbabwe is a transit country for trafficking victims and migrants vulnerable to exploitation, including from Somalia, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Zambia, often en route to South Africa.

In 2019, the government of Zimbabwe, through the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage developed its National Migration Policy with support from the IOM. The country has witnessed increased internal and border migration resulting in an upsurge in irregular migration, human smuggling and mixed migration flows. It is noted that a policy drafting workshop was held in Mutare from 25 to 28 March 2019 to come up with a comprehensive policy framework that deals with migration and development.

In the article “Child Trafficking and Child Smuggling in Zimbabwe: Legislation and Policy Gaps,” Mabvurira finds that many Zimbabwean children are smuggled in and out of the country to visit their parents or

relatives staying illegally in neighbouring countries. This is usually done during school holidays. The malaicha, who are drivers that help people cross the borders illegally, either through designated entry points or undesignated entry points, in Zimbabwe, were reported to work in cooperation with other agents across the border who would take the clients once they are in another country. In Beitbridge, it was reported that children could be smuggled by truck drivers who would hide them under car seats or by some women who stay in the town specifically for smuggling children.

CONCLUSION

In Southern Africa, there is difficulty in differentiating smuggling of migrants from trafficking in persons as a result of conflation. The high poverty and unemployment rates, coupled with the prevalent need to get better opportunities in neighbouring countries, has enabled the vice in Southern Africa. There is therefore a need to harmonise regional migrant smuggling legislation with international protocols and conventions to ensure an adequate solution.



SIMALI Baldric Elijah

THE INAUGURAL TRAINING SESSION FOR PEACE AMBASSADORS AHEAD OF UGANDA'S 2026 GENERAL ELECTIONS



Participants share a photo with the Distinguished Speakers at the UNAFRI Secretariat, Naguru

The United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) hosted a one-day workshop dedicated to empowering Ugandan youth in the prevention of election-related violence and crimes. This initiative equipped young people with the knowledge, skills, and motivation needed to foster peaceful and credible electoral processes across the country.

This workshop brought together student leaders from various universities such as Makerere University, Makerere University Business School, Law Development Centre, Kyambogo University, Kampala International University, Islamic University in Uganda, Nkumba University, as well as youth leaders in the greater Kampala Metropolitan Area. The event managed to achieve: dissemination of civic and voter education; identification and prevention of electoral crimes; conflict resolution and peacebuilding skills; as well as the use of technology and social media.

The training was facilitated by speakers to

include Hon Justice Simon Byabakama, the Chairman of the Uganda Electoral Commission, Commissioner Lamex Omara from the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), Assistant DPP Barbara Kawuma from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), Commissioner Kasimo Thomas from the Uganda Police Force (UPF), Ms Rebecca Atwiine, the Special Presidential Assistant responsible for Anti-Corruption at the State House, and Hon Kabyanga Godfrey, the Minister of State for ICT and National Guidance.

The youth were trained to avoid election violence and electoral crimes as a strategic investment in democracy, peace, and national development. Having young people equipped with knowledge, skills, and ethical values, societies can foster a culture of non-violence, accountability, and civic responsibility. Through collaborative and sustained efforts, the youth can transition from being instruments of electoral malpractices to ambassadors of peaceful and credible elections, ensuring that the future of democracy rests on a solid and peaceful foundation.

OPENING REMARKS



Hon. Justice Simon Byabakama - Chairman Uganda Electoral Commission



The Chairman expressed his pleasure at attending the Peace Ambassadors workshop, held at the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) secretariat in Naguru, Kampala.

The concept of 'free and fair elections' is not explicitly defined under Ugandan law, but the Supreme Court of Uganda has provided guidance, especially in the landmark case of **Kizza Besigye versus Yoweri Museveni and the Electoral Commission, Supreme Court, Presidential Petition No.1 of 2001**. It was stated in that case that to ensure elections are free and fair, sufficient time should be allocated for all stages, including nominations, campaigns, voting, and vote counting. Candidates must not be deprived of their right to run, and citizens should not be denied the right to vote for their preferred candidates through unfair manipulation by electoral officials.

There must be a level playing field so that incumbents, government ministers, and officials do not have an unfair advantage. The entire election process

should be carried out in an environment free from intimidation, bribery, violence, coercion, or any actions intended to undermine the will of the people. Election procedures should guarantee ballot secrecy, accurate counting, and timely announcement of results. Election laws and guidelines for participants should be prepared and published well in advance. Fairness and transparency must be maintained throughout all stages of the electoral process. Those who commit electoral offenses or otherwise undermine the process should face strict penalties. The Electoral Commission must resolve election disputes promptly and fairly.

As Chairman of the Uganda Electoral Commission,





he reaffirmed that the foundation of Uganda's democracy is the principle that ultimate power belongs to the people. The Constitution, adopted in 1995, upholds this core principle and states that Ugandans exercise their sovereignty through regular, credible, and participatory elections. It is the duty of every citizen not only to value these rights but also to perform the associated responsibilities with care and integrity.

The Constitution also details the rights and responsibilities of every Ugandan citizen. Citizens are encouraged not only to participate in choosing their leaders but also to respect the rule of law, promote peace, and support national unity. He particularly urged young people, who represent both the present and future of our nation, to take pride in the country's progress, stay alert against divisive influences, and actively work toward building a peaceful, democratic society.

He reminded the youth about the preamble to the Constitution, which solemnly recognizes the painful chapters of political turmoil, conflict, and instability that Uganda has endured. Citing these experiences as hard-earned lessons, he encouraged young people to understand the fragile nature of peace and the shared responsibility to protect it. He emphasized that the current constitutional order, which guarantees citizens' rights and establishes democratic processes, was built from a commitment to never repeat past mistakes.

In his speech, he urged the youth to see themselves as guardians of their heritage, responsible for making sure Uganda's future isn't damaged by divisions and conflicts that once threatened its unity. By choosing

dialogue over

confrontation, respecting others' rights and dignity, and actively rejecting violence in all its forms, young Ugandans can help build strong, resilient communities. He encouraged them to take leadership in their communities, promote civic education, and serve as ambassadors of peace through both words and actions.

Ultimately, he encouraged the youth to find inspiration in Uganda's journey, to stay vigilant and proactive, not just in protecting peace but also in promoting the democratic values that support the nation's growth. Their dedication, he emphasized, would serve as a guiding light for future generations, ensuring that the sacrifices of the past result in a stable, inclusive, and harmonious society for everyone.

He cautioned the youth that the integrity of elections remains under threat from ongoing challenges, with corruption being particularly harmful. Election corruption, whether through vote-buying or acts such as buying waragi (local brew) for voters, manipulation of voter registers, or abuse of public resources, erodes public trust and distorts the true will of the people.

Peaceful elections are not solely the result of institutional frameworks; they are a collective achievement, built through the actions of conscientious individuals. He urged the youth to continue educating, engaging, and empowering one another, so that the democratic process is not just an event but a living testament to our shared aspirations. He expressed his gratitude to the youth for their attention, dedication, and commitment to peace and democracy in Uganda.



EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR PEACEFUL AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS



Commissioner Lamex Omara Apitta - Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC)



Commissioner Lamex extended heartfelt greetings on behalf of the Chairperson of Uganda Human Right Commission (UHRC), who though unable to attend in person, conveyed her best wishes for a productive and impactful dialogue.

The session underscored a powerful truth: in any thriving democracy, elections are not just periodic events they are the heartbeat of governance and accountability. Through elections, citizens express their will, select their leaders, and define the direction of their nation. For these processes to be meaningful, elections must be credible, transparent, and above all, peaceful.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN DEMOCRACY

Young people make up a significant proportion of Uganda's population and are a vital force in shaping its political future. Empowering youth to participate actively, constructively, and

peacefully in elections is not merely desirable it is essential for democracy to thrive.

As the speech noted, "Youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow they are the leaders of today." In Uganda, more than half of the voting population is under 35. This demographic power can shape electoral outcomes, hold leaders accountable, and influence national discourse. Youth are not only voters; they are organizers,



digital influencers, peacebuilders, election observers, and increasingly, candidates for public



office.

However, despite their potential, many young people remain disengaged from formal political processes. Barriers such as limited civic education, systemic exclusion, voter apathy, and distrust in institutions continue to hinder meaningful participation. True engagement must therefore begin with understanding the principles of representation, accountability, and public participation that define democratic governance.

BARRIERS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Several key challenges were highlighted:

Lack of Information: Many young people lack access to accurate and timely electoral information, leaving space for misinformation and manipulation.

Youth Violence: Some youth are exploited by political actors and drawn into violence. This destructive trend undermines democracy and must stop.

Ethnic Polarization: Tribal divisions are often manipulated for political gain, turning elections into contests of identity rather than ideas.

Monetization of Politics: Vote-buying and financial manipulation erode integrity and

cheapen democratic choice.

Decline in Values: A growing disregard for integrity, empathy, and responsibility threatens the moral fabric of leadership and citizenship.

Fake News and Disinformation: The spread of falsehoods on digital platforms undermines truth, trust, and peace.

STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERING YOUTH

To build an inclusive and peaceful democracy, several strategies were proposed:

Civic and Political Education: Strengthening civic education in schools, communities, and online platforms to empower youth with knowledge and responsibility.

Responsible Digital Engagement: Encouraging youth to use technology to promote peace and counter misinformation.

Inclusive Political Spaces: Reducing barriers to youth participation in politics and nurturing leadership through mentorship and training.

Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention: Empowering youth as peace ambassadors to mediate and unite communities.

Volunteering in Electoral Processes: Encouraging youth participation as observers, civic educators, and polling assistants to enhance accountability



from within.

A CALL FOR PEACEFUL PARTICIPATION

Peaceful and credible elections are a shared national responsibility. Every citizen especially the youth has a role to play in ensuring that democracy remains a tool for progress, not division. The message was clear: young people must reject violence and instead become agents of reconciliation, truth, and justice.

CONCLUSION

Empowering youth for peaceful and credible elections is not a one-time campaign but a continuous journey of education, engagement, and transformation. With the right support, Uganda's youth can become the driving force behind a future rooted in peace, justice, and democracy.



As the closing words reminded participants:

"The ballot is stronger than the bullet." Abraham Lincoln

Let the youth of Uganda choose the ballot, choose peace, and choose to build a better nation for all.



THE ROLE OF THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS IN PROSECUTING ELECTORAL OFFENCES



Ms. Barbara Kawuma Bugembe – Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions (ADPP)

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) in Uganda is mandated by Article 120 of the 1995 Constitution to oversee all criminal prosecutions in the country's courts, excluding the court martial. The ODPP's vision is to achieve a crime-free society, and its mission centers on managing and prosecuting criminal cases to reduce the national crime rate.

CORE FUNCTIONS OF THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS

Directing investigations into criminal matters:

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) oversees and guides law enforcement agencies during criminal investigations. This includes issuing instructions on how investigations should be carried out to ensure they are thorough, legal, and follow established procedures. The ODPP reviews evidence collected by investigators and may request additional inquiries to strengthen cases before they go to court. This role is especially important in electoral offenses, where detailed investigation is essential to establish facts, identify suspects, and gather

admissible evidence that supports prosecution.

Instituting criminal proceedings in competent courts (except court martial):

The ODPP has the authority to start criminal cases by officially filing charges against suspects in courts of law, excluding military courts. This includes preparing charge sheets, presenting evidence, and prosecuting cases on behalf of the government. In cases involving electoral offenses, the ODPP assesses whether there is enough evidence to prosecute suspects, files appropriate charges, and represents the public interest throughout the prosecution process to ensure justice is achieved and electoral laws are maintained.

Taking over or discontinuing criminal proceedings initiated by others:

The ODPP has the statutory authority to take over criminal cases initiated by other individuals or agencies, ensuring consistency and alignment with the public interest. This can be done to uphold high prosecutorial standards and prevent the misuse of the legal process. Additionally, the ODPP may



withdraw criminal proceedings at any point before judgment, whether due to insufficient evidence, public interest considerations, or legal technicalities. In electoral matters, this guarantees that cases are handled professionally and ethically, strengthening confidence in the justice system.

Prosecution is a public service carried out on behalf of the public, where prosecutors use discretion in key areas such as identifying suspects, deciding charges, managing bail requests, amending charges, summoning witnesses, proposing sentences, and reviewing appeals. The prosecutor's main role is to help the court make fair and just decisions and sentences, always protecting public interest and the integrity of the justice system.

Management of Electoral Offences

Electoral offenses are treated as criminal acts and are governed by various laws, including the Penal Code, the Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections Acts, the Political Parties Act, and the Computer Misuse Act. These laws cover illegal practices starting from the nomination stage, continuing through campaigns, and up to voting and counting, affecting candidates, their agents, election officials, and the public.

A person cannot be prosecuted for an electoral offense without the approval of the Director of Public Prosecutions, although arrest and charging are allowed. Such proceedings must start within three months of the alleged offence.

Electoral Offences

Electoral offenses include various illegal actions that threaten the fairness of the election process. These consist of candidates making false declarations, accepting foreign funding for their campaigns, or engaging in incitement and hate speech. Other offenses involve individuals attempting to vote multiple times, carrying unauthorized firearms at polling stations, or conducting campaign activities outside the legally allowed times.

Bribery of voters, or accepting bribes, also constitutes a serious crime, as does enabling ineligible individuals to vote. Spreading false statements about candidates, failing to report election results, or tampering with voting materials through forgery or destruction are additional violations. Furthermore, interfering with ballot boxes, impersonating legitimate voters, exerting undue influence, such as through threats or abduction, and conducting unauthorized campaigning near polling stations all constitute offences. The defacement of election materials and the obstruction of election officials in their duties are also recognized as electoral offenses.

Challenges in Prosecution of Electoral Offences

Electoral offences occur throughout the election cycle, including primary elections, nominations, campaigns, and voting days. Challenges include increased lawlessness, distinguishing between legitimate campaign facilitation and bribery, and determining responsibility for supporters' actions. The electoral environment often becomes highly charged, leading to unusual behaviour and complicating enforcement efforts.



EFFORTS BY THE DIRECTORATE OF CRIME INTELLIGENCE TO PREVENT CRIME AND PROMOTE PEACE AHEAD OF 2026 ELECTIONS



Commissioner Kasimo Thomas - Uganda Police Force (UPF)



Commissioner Kasimo Thomas of the Directorate of Crime Intelligence recently spoke at the Youth Peace Ambassadors Workshop, organised in anticipation of the upcoming 2026 presidential and parliamentary elections. In his speech, he started by thanking UNAFRI for organizing such a timely and vital workshop, emphasising the importance of proactive engagement with young people in maintaining peace and security during politically sensitive times.

He highlighted several targeted police efforts aimed at reducing crime, especially in the capital city, Kampala. Recognising the unique challenges faced by youth in urban areas, the police have taken significant steps to engage with this group through specific initiatives. One of the key strategies has been the organisation and support of ghetto youth projects.

These initiatives are designed to give young people realistic alternatives to criminal activities by offering access to financial resources, practical skills training, and mentorship opportunities. By involving youth directly in positive community projects, the police aim to empower them to pursue constructive livelihoods and make meaningful contributions to society.

In addition to ghetto youth programmes, he highlighted the success of boda boda





From left to right, Com. Kasimo Thomas, Dr. Kitio Édouard (DG UNAFRI)

projects, which provide employment and skills development opportunities for young people. By supporting the boda boda (motorcycle taxi) sector, a key source of income in Kampala, the police aim to divert vulnerable youth from crime and towards sustainable economic activities. Such initiatives not only create jobs but also foster a sense of responsibility and community belonging.

To further enhance election security and transparency, the police have established a dedicated electoral and political office. This specialised unit is responsible for overseeing all election-related activities, ensuring that the electoral process remains fair and peaceful. The creation of this office demonstrates the police's commitment to supporting democratic processes and maintaining public trust during elections.



He also discussed ongoing efforts to monitor and counteract terrorism, highlighting the constant need for vigilance against evolving security threats. He warned the youth about the increasing trend of political actors forming rebel groups after elections, a pattern that endangers national stability. Importantly, he cautioned participants not to be tempted into subversive or illegal activities by individuals seeking to destabilise peace for political reasons.

In conclusion, he assured workshop participants that the Uganda Police Force is well prepared to uphold law and order during the election period. He emphasised that the combined efforts of police, youth, and civil society organisations are essential for protecting the integrity of the democratic process. By promoting youth empowerment and maintaining vigilant oversight, the Directorate of Crime Intelligence remains committed to fostering a peaceful and secure environment where the 2026 elections can be conducted freely and safely.



INSIGHTS BY THE SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL ASSISTANT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANTI-CORRUPTION AT THE STATE HOUSE.



Ms. Rebecca Atwiine - Special Presidential Assistant (SPA)



Uganda continues to grapple with electoral corruption, a problem that undermines the nation's democratic processes and disproportionately affects its youth. As young people gathered at UNAFRI to seek solutions, Ms. Rebecca Atwiine, the Special Presidential Assistant in charge of Anti-Corruption at the State House, emphasized the urgent need for ethical leadership, civic education, and institutional reforms.

DEFINING CORRUPTION AND ELECTORAL OFFENCES

Corruption, as defined under Ugandan law and international conventions, encompasses bribery, embezzlement, extortion, and abuse of power for personal gain. Uganda's Anti-Corruption Act and electoral laws specifically recognise acts such as voter bribery, misinformation, personation, and other dishonest practices as criminal offences. These illicit

activities undermine public trust and compromise the integrity of the electoral process.

THE VULNERABILITY OF UGANDA'S YOUTH

Young people are often targeted and exploited in corrupt electoral schemes due to high unemployment, economic hardship, and limited civic awareness. Many are enticed by promises from politicians or driven by survival instincts, often unwittingly





becoming involved in bribery, election violence, and other malpractices. The lack of strict enforcement and civic education further heightens their vulnerability.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

Electoral corruption has serious consequences for Ugandan youth, including loss of life, injuries, and long-term disabilities caused by election-related violence. It encourages political instability, poor service delivery, and a continual decline in democratic values. Corrupt electoral processes lead to unaccountable leaders, undermine human rights, and damage public trust in institutions—issues that hinder Uganda’s development and social cohesion.

PATHWAYS TO REFORM

To address these challenges, the State House Anti-Corruption Office recommends several key reforms. First, promoting civic education is essential to ensure that young people are aware of their rights and responsibilities within the electoral process. Additionally, implementing robust oversight and enforcement mechanisms can effectively deter electoral malpractice.

Empowering young people through economic initiatives and leadership training will further strengthen their resilience against corrupt influences. Finally, reinforcing legal frameworks to prevent individuals implicated in corruption from holding public office is crucial for safeguarding the integrity of elections and restoring public trust. Stakeholders are also encouraged to leverage government programmes aimed at uplifting youth,

such as youth funds and entrepreneurship projects, while demanding transparency and accountability in resource allocation.

CONCLUSION

Ugandan society must reject corruption, promote transparency, and empower its youth to become advocates for integrity. Only through ethical leadership, effective education, and strong institutions can Uganda attain credible, peaceful, and fair elections, laying the groundwork for lasting democratic development.



CLOSING REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONAL GUIDANCE



Hon Kabyanga Godfrey Baluku



The Minister of State for Information, Communications Technology and National Guidance officiated at the closing ceremony of the inaugural Youth Ambassador's workshop and delivered a keynote speech at the event hosted by UNAFRI in Naguru, themed, ***"Harnessing Technology & Social Media for Peaceful Elections."*** In his speech, he explained how social media platforms have evolved into the modern marketplace of ideas, a new public square where discussions, debates, and mobilization occur at an unprecedented speed and scale.

He emphasised both the transformative potential and the risks linked to these platforms. On one side, social media can amplify voices, bridge divides between communities, and promote civic participation. On the other, it can act as a tool for spreading misinformation, fostering division, and weakening the democratic process. He encouraged the youth ambassadors to see themselves as guardians of truth and to actively promote responsible digital conduct.

By challenging fake news, nurturing civil debate, and supporting positive narratives, they can help ensure that technology is used to unite rather than divide.

Furthermore, he encouraged participants to organize digital campaigns that promote issue-based dialogue and peaceful participation in the electoral process. This includes using fact-checking resources, engaging in respectful debate, and supporting efforts to educate their peers about the importance of free and fair elections. The Minister linked these responsibilities to the NRM Government's 2026





theme of ***“Protecting the Gains,”*** a commitment to maintaining peace, stability, and democracy, while harnessing technology as a catalyst for national progress and unity.

In conclusion, he urged every youth ambassador to become a beacon of reliable information in their communities, leveraging technology not just as a communication tool but as a means to



nurture a more peaceful and inclusive Uganda. The workshop concluded with a lively discussion on innovative strategies to ensure social media supports rather than undermine the country's democratic goals.



THE EMERGENCE OF KUSH: THE SYNTHETIC CANNABINOID KUSH IN SIERRA LEONE

SIMALI Baldric Elijah - Legal Intern at UNAFRI



Fig (2) Kush: Sierra Leone's new illegal drug image source [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com).

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in June 2024, flagged harmful new drug concoctions, namely kush, Khadafi, and Monkey Tail, as posing particular health risks across Africa due to their varying and often unknown ingredients. In West Africa, the pre-existing and emerging use of drug mixtures such as kush, is an increasing threat to public health. In Sierra Leone, there has emerged a surprising increase in the consumption of kush. A critical examination of the drivers of the kush trend within Sierra Leone's illicit drug sector remains of fundamental importance among policy makers, law enforcement agencies, and public health practitioners, seeking ways of mitigating its adverse social impacts. In order to address the emerging threat, it is crucial to start from the root of the problem, hence an analysis of the drug in Sierra Leone.

Kush, a chemically manufactured blend of potent

synthetic opioids called nitazenes, some of which are 25 times stronger than fentanyl, and synthetic cannabinoids, has been the causative agent of a public health and security crisis on the African continent and has been prevalent in West African nations like Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia. The low cost of the drug has come with very addictive traits which have been largely responsible for the crisis being seen amongst youth. To this effect, governments face more demanding challenges imposing restrictions on production and distribution as the traffickers exploit existing loopholes in the law and porous borders. This article examines the prevalence, the organised criminal nature, and the ramifications of kush within Sierra Leone.

BACKGROUND

The influx of cheap, addictive, harmful, and locally mixed synthetic drugs are durably changing West Africa, and with new drug consumption markets



emerging, serious health risks are difficult to counter by a poorly prepared health system, and increasing numbers of youth in a growing West Africa will be affected across socio-economic demographics. Since 2021, kush has spread across the subregion into Guinea, the Gambia, and to a lesser extent, Senegal and Ghana. These drugs are inexpensive, and provide an escape from unemployment, the drudgery of poverty, sexual and physical abuse, and the effect, in some cases, from having been a child soldier.

A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) February 2025 Report notes that drug use in Sierra Leone has long antecedents, as youth hangout spaces were prominent places of consumption of poyo (palm wine), omoly (a gin), and cannabis, in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1991-2002 civil war, which was sparked by a separatist and agrarian revolutionary movement, became increasingly brutal and involved the large-scale distribution of drugs such as crack cocaine, cannabis, and heroin to combatants. After the war, the illicit emergence of the painkiller tramadol in 2008 was a key milestone in Sierra Leone's drug markets. Tramadol became popular with heroin users and individuals who were new to drugs. In 2016, the Pharmacy Board of Sierra Leone declared tramadol abuse a national health emergency and regulation of the drug increased, as did law enforcement pressure.

According to the report (supra), kush entered retail drug markets in the country around 2017, and by 2020, it was the most widely consumed drug. The

cheap, extremely addictive and increasingly deadly arrival of the drug marked a step change in the scale of domestic drug consumption, and consequently drug-related harms. Since 2021, kush has spread across retail drug markets in other countries in the subregion, including Liberia, Guinea, the Gambia, and more recently, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal.

The report finds that kush in Freetown is typically sold as either 'hard' or 'mild', with subcategories available. The most prominent among the subcategories are djagaban (also called 'buga', referring to a hard variety), TM and K2 (both reportedly broadly falling into the mild category). From the report, people who use drugs (PWUD) widely reported needing to use increasing amounts of kush, particularly from 2022 onwards, and reported overdoses believed to be related to kush having significantly increased since 2022. The PWUD interviewed reported knowing between two and four individuals, on average, who they believed had died from kush use between December 2023, and June 2024. From 2022 onwards, bodies have been placed in the street by those who own large kush-use places and picked up by the authorities early in the morning.

In 2020, the kush market surged, and suddenly the country had a more popular drug than cannabis, as kush's low price and highly addictive composition contributed to a rapid escalation in consumption. In 2020-2021, two individuals working in partnership seized control of a group operating around Eastern Police (Freetown), established a network of mid-level distributors and dealers, and strongly accelerated growth of the operation and the broader market. By late 2022, the kush market became bigger, more potent and deadlier. From that period, more deaths and serious health effects believed to be linked to kush were reported.

On 4th April 2024, President Julius Maada Bio declared a national emergency over drug use, principally due to the devastating impact on public health of the substance sold across the country. He launched a task force on drug and substance abuse, promising to lead a government approach focused on

prevention and treatment involving law enforcement and community engagement. A subsequent surge of law enforcement activity drove the kush market more underground and contributed to a temporary increase in retail prices. By late 2024, consumption of kush remained widespread, as the scope, scale and impact of the kush market was unprecedented in the country. Sierra Leone remains the centre of the kush trade, and across the subregion, kush is believed to be largely imported by sea, through informal wharves, and by land using official and unofficial border crossings.

THE SUPPLY ROUTES

Kush and other chemical components enter Sierra Leone by sea, mainly through the port, and by air. Queen Elizabeth II Quay is an important entry point for kush, particularly for pre-processed imports which require larger volumes. Seizures at the quay peaked in 2021, and mostly involved consignments of organic matter, between 2 and 60 kgs, concealed in personal possessions. A notable 2024 seizure at the port involved a March shipment from Rotterdam containing an estimated 300 kg of organic matter concealed among personal effects. Several seized bags of organic matter were labelled as 'mullein leaves, Verbascum Thapsus', a plant used for oils and teas and bore the branding of a superfood company established in Greece. The second route is the airport, as kush components, notably the active ingredients and the marshmallow leaf, arrive there via international courier services. Seizures at the airport, though limited, have been from courier services rather than passengers.

AN ORGANISED CRIMINAL NETWORK

The report finds that the decentralised structure and the presence of old and established criminal players have led to significant variation in the share of the market captured by individuals in specific roles. These roles include the owners, the 'lock' (also known as the 'interface'), cooks, distributors, retailers, and finally PWUD. It can be noted that some of these roles can

overlap, as there are owners who also distribute, retailers who are also owners, and PWUD who are retailers and distributors.

The market is led by owners, who operate as financiers and often organise imports and typically have access to three types of resources: finance to buy active ingredients or pre-processed kush; an ability to ensure some form of protection, either at the local level to protect synthesis, or at points of entry to safeguard imports; and an international connection to import pre-processed kush. The 'locks' are a shield between the owner and the day-to-day operations, and they usually have a personal connection to the financier but are often under severe pressure to protect the owner's identity. The cooks are concerned with the production of the drug, so much so that those connected to the larger operations tend to have basic chemical knowledge, but this is not always the case. The number of cooks is likely to be small and potentially a bottleneck in the market.

It is at the level of distributors that the market becomes increasingly complex and crowded because of the large numbers, the wide range in kush volumes handled and the complex interlinkages. Large distributors regularly trade in quantities of 250 grams, 500 grams, and 1 kilogram, known as quarters, halves, and one. They tend to sell to medium and small distributors who trade in anything between 250 grams and 28 grams. A notable characteristic of big distributors is their interlinked trade, since most know each other well and tend to trade with



one another, presumably as kush supply lines are not fixed but depend on which cook has product and which lock or distributor has access to pre-processed kush. Retailers cut the ounces of kush, and even smaller packages for small retailers, into tiny pieces, each wrapped in a piece of paper before being sold for consumption.

At the top of the retail pyramid are owners of 'cartels.' In Sierra Leone, some cartels can host 50-100 users, and some owners have many cartels, some of which tend to have relatively fixed supply lines, ultimately working for one owner. Cartels have a social function for marginalised people and are safe places for consumption because of local protection. Finally, there are the people who use kush, who are most often young and male, according to the report. Most kush users report using as much as they can purchase in a day, averaging between 2 and 6 hits but going as high as 20. A significant insight is the co-dependent relationship between PWUD and retailers. It is noted that PWUD need retailers who can ensure a degree of protection from law enforcement, but they also seek forms of social protection and care from retailers.

RISK FACTORS

The low price of kush is a key driver of its fast expansion across consumer markets, alongside the addictive nature of the chemicals. The report highlights that the average price of a dose of kush remained stable at US\$ 0.2 between 2019 and 2021, increasing slightly from 2022 and significantly by January 2024, in response to the law enforcement crackdown, high inflation and the distance kush needs to be transported. By July and November 2024, kush could be procured at the market at both low and high prices, suggesting increasing price differentials.

Additionally, the role of gangs has surfaced in the kush market. The social background of owners and cooks is generally unconnected to the market for violence, and among medium and small distributors, peddler crews, and 'big man' retailers, there is a high proportion of former gang leaders. The retail level of the kush market also has a relationship with this market of

violence, since most cartels previously dealt in crack, cannabis, and cocaine. Some are owned and run by ex-combatant commanders, while others employ ex-combatants and gang misfits for protection.

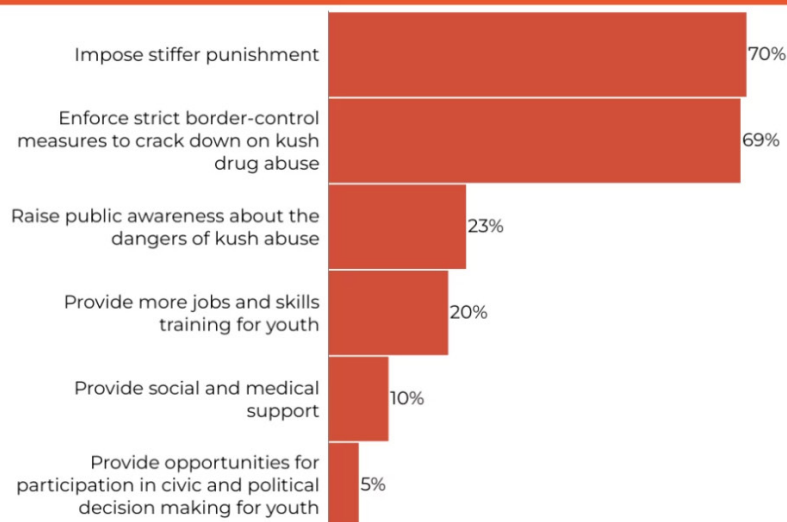
RAMIFICATIONS

Soon after the emergence of kush in the country, it was rumoured that politicians were behind its import and distribution, according to the report. The report also notes that most evidence points to predominantly



local protection structures, concentrated around points of entry and spaces for cooking, distribution, and retails, rather than political protection at a national level. There have been instances of local protection involving port officials, police, the judiciary, and members of parliament (MPs). Analysis from the report suggests a protection system reminiscent of the complex overlap between state and non-state interests common during and after the war. It is on that basis that importers of kush benefit from localised protection and loopholes in screening and security systems.

There are also instances of (private sector) individuals employed at ports of entry, or by companies importing or exporting through them, offering local protection or facilitation of the trade. Most commonly, this includes reported petty corruption in the form of bribes paid to longshoremen to turn a blind eye to the contents of particular containers, backpacks, and suitcases. Additionally, this has resulted into the decentralised protection within the law, to the effect that the vulnerability of cooking facilities to disruption, necessitates protection which also



Respondents who say they have heard of kush were asked: People have different views on how the issue of kush abuse in Sierra Leone could be addressed. In your opinion, what should be the first most important approach to addressing kush abuse? And what would be the second approach? (Figure shows combined responses for respondents' first- and second-choice approaches.) (Respondents who had not heard of kush are excluded.)

happens in distribution. The report highlights a large cartel in the city centre, owned by a renowned criminal, operating 100 metres from the police station without interference.

It is noted that the drug leaves people lethargic, desperate, and ill. From a public health perspective, since 2020, the Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital, the country's only psychiatric hospital, has seen a 4,000% increase in people presenting with problematic drug use. The government has sought to increase access to treatment for PWUD by expanding the services of the Kissy Rehabilitation Centre and opening the National Rehabilitation Centre, on the outskirts of Freetown, among other measures. Conversely, the law enforcement response was particularly pronounced in 2024, as there were many raids on distributors and retailers, and arrests of key distributors and owners, who were denied bail, although often it is later informally granted. The absence of a strong law enforcement response until 2024 and the selectiveness with which the response is being executed has to be understood in the wider political economy of the country.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the vice of kush and its rapid spread across the Sierra Leonean drug market has resulted into a serious public health crisis which has eventually had a devastating effect on PWUD, their families, and the society at large. The notable highly addictive nature and the low cost of the drug have simplified the access to the drug which has trapped those who use it in a cycle of dependency, mental illness, as well as social marginalisation. The country is thus tasked with ensuring the adoption of a multifaceted approach to deal with the vice, going beyond punitive measures, and addressing the root causes which include youth unemployment and social alienation.

LAUNCH OF THE YOUTH CRIME REPORT: JUVENILE OFFENDING IN UGANDA, 2017-2024



On September 25, 2025, Mr. Munanura Andrew Karokora, the deputy Director General of UNAFRI represented our organization at the official launch of the ***“Youth Crime Report: Juvenile Offending in Uganda, 2017-2024,”*** a research study prepared by the Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) with support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The event gathered key stakeholders from government, law enforcement, civil society, and international partners. The report provides an in-depth analysis of trends and patterns in juvenile offending over the past seven years, focusing on underlying causes, legal and policy frameworks, government interventions in Uganda, and the impact of socio-economic factors. It also provides policy recommendations and practical strategies for preventing and rehabilitating young offenders.

KEY AREAS ADDRESSED DURING THE LAUNCH INCLUDED:

1. Statistical trends in juvenile crime in Uganda from 2017 to 2024, with 2021 notably missing.
2. Contributing factors like poverty, limited access to education, and family breakdown
3. The effectiveness of current interventions and the existing gaps in the juvenile justice system
4. Recommendations for cross-sector collaboration to reduce youth offending

