

Statement

By

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Mr. President,

It is a special honour and pleasure for me to address you in my capacity as Minister of Internal Affairs of Uganda, who carries political responsibility for crime prevention and control, including police and prisons matters.

First of all, I wish to express my greatest appreciation to the United Nations for organizing these periodic Congresses which are of vital importance to developing and developed countries alike. Uganda has demonstrated its strong commitment to these efforts not only by hosting the African Regional Preparatory Meetings for this Congress and the previous one, but also by providing a home to the United Nations African Institute on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI).

In view of this close involvement in United Nations activities, it is clear that Uganda fully supports the recommendations of the 1998 African Preparatory Meeting in Kampala and the most useful work of UNAFRI.

This is also true of the resolutions adopted by the UN Crime Commission and ECOSOC over the last three years, namely on improvement of prisons conditions (1997), reduction of prisons overcrowding and alternative sentencing (1998) and penal reform (1999).

In addition, Uganda fully endorses the Draft Declaration on Crime and Justice, which is before this Congress, and the amendments proposed by Penal Reform International, as well as this Organization's Ten Point Plan on Reducing Imprisonment.

Last, but not least, Uganda is in complete agreement with the Draft United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the draft protocols thereto.

Distinguished Delegates,

Uganda continues to accord high priority to efficiency, fairness and improvement in the management and administration of criminal justice, with due regard to human rights, as a fundamental prerequisite for social and economic development.

The strengthening of law enforcement and the administration of justice and fighting corruption have been at the very heart of governmental policy in the last fourteen years. This provided a solid ground for rebuilding a shattered economy and controlling inflation, re-establishing a quality Civil Service and furthering the capacity of local government through constitutional reforms, decentralization and democratization.

The Government of Uganda continues to be strongly committed to the promotion of human rights in criminal justice. The Constitution of 1995 sets out possibly one of the most complete

human rights sections. It dilates on those frequently ignored: the disabled, gender and children. It includes the establishment of a Constitutional Court and speaks of making justice more relevant and easily understood by the ordinary person.

A new Children's Statute gives legal effect to international obligations relating to the child, especially under the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the OAU Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child, both ratified by Uganda.

In accordance with the Constitution, a national autonomous Human Rights Commission with far reaching quasi-judicial powers has been established. Members of the Commission visit jails, prisons, and places of detention with a view to inspecting and assessing conditions of inmates and making recommendations. In co-operation with the Commission, the Uganda Police has developed a Human Rights Training Manual for Police Trainers. We are now jointly elaborating a similar Manual for Prison Officers.

In order to improve performance and raise efficiency in the sector of law and order, the Government of Uganda has introduced a sector-wide and chain-linked approaches which will bring together police and prisons service, the Ministry of Justice and constitutional affairs, the judiciary and the Directorate of

Public Prosecution. The programme is in its early stages, but has already captured the attention of both the public and the donor world. It will contribute positively to the speedy, fair trial and humane treatment of offenders through cooperation, communication and co-ordination among all the above players in criminal justice administration.

Uganda accords priority to acceptable policing in democracy and has established community policing as a strategy by the police to promote accountability openness and fairness in Justice administration.

Mobilising rural settlements that are distant from the towns to participate in policing themselves becomes an effective way of according the rural poor access to justice.

Another development in the area of rights of women and children is the establishment of the Child and Family Protection Unit in the police.

The Unit is charged with handling violations against women and children with sensitivity from a gender and children perspective.

Although this unit is still under resourced, we are satisfied that the unit will ensure rule of law is upheld within family relationships and more generally within communities.

We would welcome further technical and logistical support on these concepts.

The measures already taken by the Uganda Government to combat corruption are substantial. The creation of a Public Service Review and Re-organization Commission and of the Office of the Inspector General of Government - the ombudsman - were turning points in the struggle against this extremely noxious crime. Uganda has also joined Transparency International and the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention in its Global Programme against Corruption, which has just started in Kampala. These significant steps once again demonstrate, in concrete terms, the unflinching commitment of our leadership to a just and honest society.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Constitution of Uganda also incorporates important international standards related to criminal justice. For example, a suspect arrested or detained shall, if not earlier released, be brought to court as soon as possible but in any case not later than forty-eight hours from the time of the arrest. When a suspect is brought before the court, the constitution grants the court power to release the suspect on court bail.

Another significant development to reduce persistent overcrowding in Uganda prisons is the introduction of community service as an

alternative to imprisonment, following an initiative by the Uganda Prisons Service and Penal Reform International, generously supported by the European Union, DANIDA and other donors. Recently, the relevant Act was adopted by Parliament. The National Committee on Community Service is now in the process of implementing the new law, starting with some pilot districts.

Uganda is also party to the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa, adopted by ten African States last month.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Uganda is hosting the regional crime prevention Institute, the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) . At the same time, following its election by the Member States of UNAFRI Governing Board and subsequent confirmation by the African Conference of Joint Ministers of Finance and Economic Planning of the Economic Commission for Africa, Uganda is the current Chairman of the Institute's Governing Board. UNAFRI was established and continues to serve as a regional mechanism and the focal point of the United Nations in the African region for promoting active and effective cooperation among African governments, other institutions and experts on issues related to crime prevention and criminal justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since our resources are extremely scarce, there still exists a big gap between these lofty standards and the reality of everyday life. Continued and increased technical assistance and advisory services are urgently needed, both multilaterally and bilaterally. Priority areas for support of the international community include:

1. Upgrading criminal justice computer services and establishing data banks for the judiciary, prosecutors, police and correctional services;
2. Provision of other basic equipment for the police, judiciary and correctional services, including means of transport;
3. Training of the Judiciary and law enforcement personnel;
4. Further criminal justice and penal reform, including revision of the Penal Code, criminal procedures and other outdated national laws and practices;
5. Revitalization of prison farms.

May I express the hope that these and other needs will receive favourable consideration not only by the United Nations technical cooperation programme and UNDP, but also by individual donors. At the same time, I wish to reaffirm my sincere gratitude to all those who have supported us so generously in the past.

In conclusion, it goes without saying that the effective fight against transnational crime and corruption presupposes efficient and humane administration of justice, based on the observance of norms and standards developed over the years by these very congresses. In accordance with their title, these congresses deal not only with crime prevention, but also with the treatment of offenders. Let me recall that we are now celebrating the 45th anniversary of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, adopted by the First Congress in 1995. Notwithstanding their age, these Rules are still the most significant and universally recognized international guide for dealing with prisoners and detainees in an effective and humane way. Let me congratulate the United Nations on this anniversary

Let me also express the hope that the next Congress on 2005 will follow-up on many of the agenda items addressed at this Congress.

Thank you!