

Remand homes need urgent reforms

THE latest Auditor General (AG's) report has revealed that 5,757 out of 9,204 juveniles sent to remand homes over the past three years are stuck there, not because their cases are complex, but because of delayed processes and overstretched institutions.

This is a national concern that demands urgent action.

Remand homes were established under the Children Act to protect, rehabilitate and reintegrate young offenders, not to keep them in overcrowded and under-resourced facilities.

The AG's report shows that most centres are operating far beyond capacity, with limited access to education, inadequate health services, outdated vocational equipment and insufficient rehabilitation programmes. Some facilities lack resident medical personnel, while several skills-training programmes are hampered by outdated tools, some dating back to the 1950s.

This is not the environment in which children can reform and rebuild their lives. The Government needs to commit resources towards improving and equipping remand homes. Ongoing construction projects in Kabale and Masindi are in the right direction. But existing



EDITORIAL

Editorial Tel: 0414 337000/337139/337125;

Fax: 0414 235843; P. O. BOX 9815 Kampalá.

Email: news@newvision.co.ug;

Marketing/Advertising Tel: 0414337000

Fax: 0414 232050

Email: advertising@newvision.co.ug

Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC);

Company listed on the Uganda Securities

Exchange

www.newvision.co.ug

facilities also require expansion, renovation and proper maintenance to meet basic health and safety standards.

Equally urgent is the staffing crisis. The report showed that one probation or social welfare officer handles an average of 37 juveniles, far above the recommended 1:8 ratio. One probation officer handling dozens of juveniles cannot deliver timely social inquiry reports or provide

meaningful supervision. This is why the 5,757 children have spent more than three months in custody due to delayed social inquiry reports that would help to guide the judicial officers.

The Government needs to recruit and deploy more probation and social welfare officers, social workers, counsellors and trained instructors.

Adequate staffing is the backbone of a child-centred justice system. This will transform centres into genuine rehabilitation hubs with functional classrooms, modern vocational tools, counselling services and structured reintegration programmes.

However, the Judiciary should also play its part by fast-tracking juvenile cases. Children should not spend months on remand awaiting hearings, especially for minor offences. Whenever a child's case drags on, their education suffers and the opportunity to guide them toward meaningful rehabilitation and a fresh start gradually fades. Dedicated court sessions for juvenile matters, firm observance of legally prescribed timelines, and the adoption of virtual hearings where suitable would go a long way in clearing the backlog.