

Issue. Residents claim they are being charged more than Shs200,000 for mortuary services.

BY FRED WAMBEDE
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

Residents of Bukasakye Sub-county in Mbale District have decried the exorbitant post-mortem fees allegedly being charged by police before they retrieve the bodies of their loved ones from mortuaries for burial.

During a *baraza* (community dialogue) organised by Justice Centres Uganda at Kibiniko village in Bukasakye Sub-county on Tuesday, the residents alleged that they are being charged more than Shs200,000 for mortuary services.

The *baraza* was held under the theme; "Mediation as sustainable method in dispute resolution."

"My lord, even when someone commits suicide, police comes with their truck and takes the body for examination and they don't bring it back. When we follow up, we are told to pay Shs200,000 before we are given the body for burial. This has to change, my lord, because we are tired," Ms Loy Namwenye, the LC1 secretary for Masaba Village, said.

Ms Namwenye was submitting to the High Court Resident Judge, Justice Susan Okalany, who was guest of honour at the dialogue.

Ms Sarah Namono, another resident, said last month they were denied custody of the body of her late brother by Mbale hospital mortuary attendants until they bargained and paid Shs150,000.

"They told us that money was for carrying out post-mortem but we were never even given a receipt. This country is rotten," Ms Namono, said.

Ms Namono asked government to intervene and charge a standard fee for mortuary services.

However, one of the police officer, who attended the *baraza* but preferred anonymity, said the fee is for the processing of a death certificate, carrying out post-mortem and treating of the body.

"The money is not paid to police but to the doctors and it's supposed to be less than Shs50, 000," the po-

Mbale residents decry high post-mortem fees



Community dialogue. Mbale High Court Resident Judge Susan Okalany addresses residents at Kibiniko Village in Bukasakye Sub-county, Mbale District on Tuesday. PHOTO BY FRED WAMBEDE

lice officer said.

Mr Robert Mukooli, another resident, asked the resident judge to consider introducing a message box so that they can be able to report corrupt judicial officers.

"Some judicial officers deliberately misplace our files after getting bribes from our opponents. We need to report such officials but we find it difficult," he said.

Mr Bashir Walimbwa, a resident, blamed the judges for taking long to rule on land cases, saying the delay is fueling land grabbing in the country.

The Chief Magistrate at Mbale High Court, Mr James Eremye Mawanda, said: "You should report corrupt judicial officers to us or any other office for action because we don't tolerate corruption," he said.

Justice Okalany urged the residents to embrace mediation as alternative dispute resolution.

"In mediation, everyone wins and it's cheap comparing to hiring

a lawyer. It does not also require formal procedures," she said.

Judge Okalany said demanding money from the residents for post-mortem is illegal and it should be stopped.

The problem is that people fail to differentiate between Mbale hospital mortuary and Mbale municipal mortuary, at Mbale hospital mortuary services are free of charge," MR SALIM AHMED KIVENJINJA SALIM, MBALE REFERRAL HOSPITAL PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATOR

"The doctors are the ones who demand this money and they are supposed to be paid by police, not relatives of the deceased," she said, adding that the cost is supposed to be not more than Shs50, 000.

She, however, advised the residents to ask their Members of Parliament to lobby for appointment

of more judges and magistrates to solve the challenges of staff shortages in the Judiciary.

Ms Patricia Acam, the manager of Justice Centre Mbale, said in a period of only one year, they have successfully handled 152 cases through mediation.

Ms Acam said most of the complaints received are from Mbale, Budaka and Sironko districts.

The Mbale Referral Hospital principal administrator, Mr Salim Ahmed Kivenjinja Salim, said at mortuary services are free.

"The problem is that people fail to differentiate between Mbale hospital mortuary and Mbale municipal mortuary, at Mbale hospital mortuary services are free of charge," he said.

The Mbale Deputy Resident District Commissioner, Ms Lilian Nakawesa, said: "We are going to investigate whether it is administration or individuals doing this fraudulently for selfish reasons."