EALA consults on draft law on human trafficking

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New system to manage building permits in secondary cities to be launched today

By Eugene Kwibuka

RWANDA: Housing Authority (RHA) will today launch a new system to manage building permits in secondary cities across the country, a step that experts have described as a breakthrough in harmonising the issuance of building permits across the country.

RHA will launch the Building Permitting Management Information System (BPMIS) in Musanze, Northern Province, in collaboration with the World Bank Group’s International Finance Corporation (IFC) in an effort to fast-track organised housing in the country’s six designated secondary cities.

The secondary cities are Musanze in Northern Province, Ruhengeri in Western Province, Muhanga and Huye in Southern Province, and Nyagatare in Eastern Province.

Officials at the RHA say the system is designed to allow applicants to submit online permit requests, shorten the time required for one-stop centres to assess, approve and report on permit applications and efficiently provide feedback on site and plot inspections.

“The new system will bring about more transparency in the issuance of building permits because it will contain clear instructions to follow and it will help us to keep the data that would otherwise be scattered across different offices in the country,” said Eng. Alice Umugwaneza, director of housing inspection unit at RHA, at a news conference in Musanze yesterday.

RHA cooperated with the World Bank’s IFC through the Investment Climate Reform Program in Rwanda to design, test and deploy the system.

The objective of the project is to avail a single online BPMIS to serve all districts. The BPMIS will integrate the currently existing permitting system, for the City of Kigali, which will undergo upgrades to include new user-friendly features such as reporting on site or plot inspections.

“The new technology will help to harmonise the issuance of building permits across the country. The same way people have drivers’ licences that are similar across the country, it will be the same with the building permits,” Eng. Umugwaneza said.

Cost-effective

Apart from making permitting services more transparent and harmonised, the new system will also reduce time and resources needed by applicants to access permitting services. RHA officials said.

They explained that applicants will now be able to track the progress of their applications online and through SMS and email notifications.

The new system is expected to attract investors in the construction industry and boost their trust and confidence in services delivered by the permitting and inspection entities because it will enhance accountability of staff dealing with permitting and processing of building permits in their respective local authorities.

Officials also say that the system will improve Rwanda’s ranking in World Bank Doing Business Report related to dealing with construction permits.

It will also contribute towards the mitigation of environmental impacts through a reduction of use of paper by completely digitalising the issuance of building permits.

EALA consults on draft law on human trafficking

By James Karuhanga

THE EAST AFRICAN Legislative Assembly (EALA) is consulting national stakeholders on how a Bill on combating human trafficking can be improved, targeting, among other deterrence measures, to severely punish individuals and organisations that facilitate the crime.

Three Rwandan EALA members, Valerie Nkabahenzu, Martin Ngoga and Christophe Bazayawo, yesterday, met experts from local institutions during a public hearing in Kigali to listen to their views on how the EAC Counter-Trafficking in Persons Bill can be enhanced.

Nkabahenzu, who chairs the sub-committee, said the main cause of the evil—human trafficking—is commercial sex activities, need for cheap or free labour and the illegal use of human organs.

“EAC partner states are affected. It is imperative for the EAC to cooperate in the fight against trafficking in persons by having adequate policies and laws that will help us to work together in a coordinated manner,” she said.

Ngoga said the private member’s Bill, introduced by Uganda’s Doris Byamukama, last month, is meant to tackle a threat that is on the border.

He said they were ready to “do more of listening than lecturing” and advised on how to enrich the Bill.

“Once we pass legislation, at the level of the East African Community, it becomes superior to national legislations. We try to work in a situation whereby our regional legislations are in conflict with international legislations,” Ngoga said.

But that should not be an issue for you (legal scholars), where you think there are deficits in your national legislations, this is a platform where you can correct those deficits because the law of the EAC is enforceable in national courts,” Ngoga added.

According to Faustin Nkusi, spokesperson of the National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA), EAC partner states need to harmonise laws on human trafficking, put in place special laws to deal with the crime, and cooperate in fighting and punishing the suspects.

Nkusi told The New Times that countries also need to “improve the quality of investigations by training judicial investigators and prosecutors, and if possible put in place special units that deal with the matter.”

Co-operation among member states is a key issue,” added Nkusi.

The Bill

The objective of the Bill is to provide for a legal framework for prevention of human trafficking, protection of trafficked persons, and development of partnership for cooperation among EAC countries in the Community.

Article 18 of the Bill partly states that prosecution of the offence of trafficking in persons shall be prosecuted in accordance with the laws of respective partner states.

Section three of the Clauses adds that such offences in the EAC shall be punishable by a minimum of 10 years imprisonment.

Frank Asime, a legal expert from Future for African Actions on Sustainable Initiatives, a local NGO, said it is imperative to draw lessons from best practices in Rwanda, including efforts to curtail the movement of traffickers through the immigration and Emigration Directorate.

Asime said it would be very “great to form a country task-force” to work with the lawmakers.

Berna Makishimana, head of research at Rwanda Law Reform Commission, said consideration needs to be given to victim’s rights through the Bill.

Nkabahenzu said: “For Rwanda, this exercise comes at a unique time because you are discussing this when you are in the process of reviewing the laws.”

Experts from several public institutions, including the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, and EAC Affairs, and the Law Reform Commission, agreed to write down and send their views to EALA for consideration.

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