

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, Rubavu and Rusizi 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 sites and plots 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 district 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 only currently existing permitting system, for the City of Kigali, which will undergo upgrades to include new and useful features such as reporting and inspection.

"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 standard with the building permits, they will look alike across the country," 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 provide a helping hand in reducing informal settlements for acquiring building permits.

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 reduction of use of paper by completely eliminating manual processes and also store data in the national data centre for efficient and secure archiving.

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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 curtailing human trafficking can be improved, targeting, among other deterrent measures, to severely punish individuals and organisations that facilitate the crime.

Three Rwandan EALA members; Valerie Nyirahabineza, Martin Ngoga and Christophe Bazivamo, 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 enriched.

Nyirahabineza, who chaired 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 Dora Byamukama, last month, is meant to tackle a problem that is cross-border in nature.

He said they were ready to "do more of listening than lecturing" and be 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 avoid a situation whereby our regional legislations are in conflict with international legislations," Ngoga said.

"But that should not be an issue for you [local stakeholders]; 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 part-

ner states need to harmonise laws on human trafficking, put in place special laws tackling the crime, and cooperate in fighting and punish the suspects.

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

"Cooperation 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, prosecution of traffickers, and development of partnerships for cooperation to counter related crimes in the Community.

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

Section three of the Clause adds that such offences, in the EAC, will be punishable by a minimum of 10 years imprisonment.

Frank Asimwe, 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 crime through the Immigration and Emigration Directorate.

Asimwe said it would be "very great to form a country task-force" to work with the lawmakers.

Beata Mukeshimana, head of research at Rwanda Law Reform Commission, said consideration needs to be given to witness protection.

Ngoga 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.



MP Nyirahabineza opens the discussion in Kigali yesterday as Ngoga looks on. Faustin Niyigena.

PENAL CODE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In the Rwandan Penal Code, Article 252 punishes human trafficking with a term of imprisonment of seven to 10 years and a fine of Rwf5 million to Rwf10 million. If the crimes listed in the clause are committed at an international level, however, the offender shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of 10 to 15 years and a fine of 10 million to 20 million Rwandan francs.

The Rwandan Penal Code is also clear on several other sentences and aspects including: Penalty for a person owning a place for human trafficking; penalties for trafficking in persons as a profession; temporary seizure and confiscation of places used for human trafficking; child trafficking by criminal organisations; and trafficking in human body organs at international level.

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