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This subject please quote No. **MOSGCA/GCA/058**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STATEMENT ON THE VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS DURING THE 2022 INAUGURAL ANNUAL ELGON FESTIVAL MBALE ORGANIZED BY BABANA BASHA MASABA TOURISM INTITATIVE

17th June, 2022, The attention of Government through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has been drawn to the recently held 2022 Inaugural Annual Elgon Festival organized by Babana Basha Masaba Tourism Initiative under the theme “Celebrating Cultural Diversity”. The festival was held on Saturday 11th June 2022 at Mbale SS Grounds.

Of particular concern to Government are the circumstances that prevailed at the Festival that reflected a violation of the rights of women and girls with respect to their dignity and exposure to the risk of sexual violence.

The Ministry initially obtained information about the event from the various social media platforms and was able to verify this information with Mbale District Community Based Services Department. What has emerged from the reports is that during the festival (very many) young women and girls were paraded and participated in a dance procession through the streets of Mbale City while dressed in skimpy attire with bare chests.

Whereas the conveners and organizers of the event are free to enjoy their cultural and birth rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, this is only practically possible if other rights are upheld in respect. Unfortunately, this event in reference was held in disrespect and in contempt with various laws of Uganda as listed below;

- 1) The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda; Article 33(1) which states that women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men. Clause (6) of the same Article specifically states that “laws, cultures, customs or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermine their status are prohibited by this Constitution”.
- 2) The Institution of Traditional or Cultural Leaders’ Act 2011; Section 14 provides that “A traditional or cultural leaders or institution shall not practice any custom, culture, usage or tradition that detracts from the rights of any person as guaranteed under the Constitution or contravenes the Constitution or any other law”.
- 3) The Children’s Amendment Act 2016, Section 7 (1) states that, “a person shall not expose a child to any customary or cultural practice that is harmful to his or her health wellbeing, education or social -economic development”. Sub-section

(2) of Section 7 delineates harmful customary or cultural practice to mean “any activity that is mentally, physically, socially or morally harmful to a child and includes an activity that interferes with a child’s education and social development”. Sub-section (3) states that “a person who contravenes this section commit an offence and is liable on conviction to a term of imprisonment not exceeding seven years or to a fine not exceeding 168 currency points”.

- 4) The anti- Pornography Act, 2014, section (14) (1) states that “a person who produces, participates in the production of, traffics in, publishes, broadcasts, procure, imports, exports or in any way abets pornography depicting image of children commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding 750 currency point or imprisonment not exceeding 15 years”. Sub-section (2) defines pornography as “any representation through publication, exhibition, indecent show, ICT, or by whatever means of a person engaged in real or stimulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a person”.

In view of the above, Government therefore, wishes to inform the general public that some of the activities of this Cultural festival are best described as unlawful, degrading and reckless. Additionally, this conduct does not represent the Country’s transformative cultures and positive social norms that we cherish with respect to the rights of women and girls and indeed all citizens.

The Ministry will therefore work with the respective Government Agencies and Local Authorities to arrive to the bottom of this matter. I therefore, urge the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to institute an inquiry and investigate into this matter so that the perpetrators are brought to book.

The Ministry working through the Department of Community Based Services in Mbale will ensure that the women and girls will be followed up for psychosocial support and referral to other services where required.

I wish to reiterate our firm commitment as Government to continue protecting the rights of women and girls as enshrined in Uganda’s progressive legal and policy frameworks.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

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