

LDC STUDENT CHARGED OVER 'AUTHORISING' CHURCH WEDDINGS

BY FAROOQ KASULE
AND DOUGLAS MUBIRU

A Law Development Centre student is facing nine counts of forgery and uttering false document authorising churches to celebrate marriages.

Joseph Mutebi, 24, is accused of forgery of the Uganda Gazette, bearing the signature of the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Gen. (rt), Kahinda Otaiire.

It is a statutory requirement for every licensed and gazetted church or mosque conducting marriages to be licensed by the government through the justice ministry. However, it emerged that Mutebi has been forging all the documents involved in this process.

Besides forging Otaiire's signature, he is also accused of forging documents to gazette Cornerstone Victors Mission Church as the place of celebration of the alleged marriages. The church in question, which is situated at Maya, on Masaka Road, belongs to one Pastor Emily Eugene Nsamba.

Mutebi was on Friday arraigned before the Buganda Road Court Grade One Magistrate, Esther Nahirya, who read out the charges to him.

Prosecution alleges that on March 22, Mutebi and others still at large, willfully forged a Uganda gazette volume CX11 No. 12 to unlawfully gazette the church as a place of celebration of marriages.

In regard to uttering false document, prosecution alleges with intent to defraud, Mutebi uttered a forged marriage licence to the church, authorising it to celebrate marriages purportedly issued by Otaiire, whereas not.

Prosecution further alleges that between March 13 and March 20, Mutebi obtained sh1.5m from Nsamba for certifying documents to register the church, which did not take place.

State Attorney Barbra Kyomugisha who teamed up with the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB) legal officer Carol Nazziwa informed court that investigations into the matter were complete.

The accused's lawyer, Isaac

Semakadde applied for bail, on grounds that Mutebi has final exams to write starting on May 5. The state did not object to his bail, but prayed for stringent terms that will compel him to appear in court whenever required.

However, the trial magistrate remanded him, until May 3, when she is slated to decide on whether or not to grant him bail.

BACKGROUND

Pastor Nsamba said earlier this year, his colleague, Pastor Stephen Kayongo, connected him to Mutebi as a person who would help him hasten the process of gazetting his church as a place of celebrating marriages. Mutebi is said to have processed the licence

which Kayongo uses to celebrate marriages.

"I contacted him and we made an appointment. He came to my church and took pictures and the necessary documents. After about a month, he gave me a licence and the gazette notice. However, when I looked at the gazette number, I realised that it had a similar number with another church. I forwarded a WhatsApp message to URSB for verification," Nsamba said, adding: "Later, URSB requested me to forward the documents to them for scrutiny and the response was negative."

Nsamba revealed that his church had not yet celebrated any marriage, but he had invited interested people to register for the same.

According to the head of the URSB enforcement unit, Joshua Kwezi, when he inquired from the Uganda Printing and Publishing Company, the gazette was found to be a forgery.

Harriet Nabuduwa, another URSB enforcement officer, asked all religious institutions to follow the right procedure, if they want to celebrate marriages.

"The proper process takes sh650,000 and there is no reason why someone would involve in dubious procedures," Nabuduwa said.

She warned that they had embarked on the process of cracking down on all unlicensed institutions solemnising marriages.