Makerere University bans sexual gestures

By Martin Kitubi and Mercy Okorom

Over the years, Makerere University has been in the news for many things including, sexual harassment.

However, the university has introduced stringent penalties for sexual offenders against students, teaching, non-teaching and support staff at the Ivory Tower.

The revised policy and regulations against sexual harassment, which New Vision has obtained, indicates that any person found guilty, shall, depending on the gravity of the offence, face demotion, suspension or dismissal.

In addition, it says, the offender will be liable to any or a combination of fines of up to two years' salary, criminal investigations and prosecution.

Other suggested penalties include restraining orders, written warnings, apology to the aggrieved party and compensation to the aggrieved party.

The revised policy gives the vice-chancellor the sole mandate to suspend a member of the university community against whom a complaint of sexual harassment has been lodged.

However, the policy has given room to any person who is not satisfied with any of the penalties to appeal within 14 days of the decision.

The revised policy and regulations were launched yesterday at Royal Suites Bugolobi, a city suburb.

Speaking at the launch, Makerere University vice-chancellor Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe said: “We are going to be strict, we will restore the dignity of everyone.”

Nawangwe, who was represented by Prof. William Bazeyo, the acting deputy vice-chancellor in charge of finance and administration, added that the university will have zero tolerance to sexual harassment.

Dr Maxime Hoinato, the United Nations Women country representative, said: “Women continue to be victims of sexual harassment at academic institutions, but we are happy that Makerere has taken a step to curb it.”

Sexual harassment defined

The revised policy and regulations prohibits sexual harassment in both on-campus and off-campus university settings.

The harassment can be against, between or among students, academic, administrative and support staff, contractors, partners, visitors and researchers.

Sexual harassment at Makerere includes: lustful gestures, such as hands or sign language to denote sexual activity, unwanted and persistent explicit or implicit propositions to engage in sexual activity.

Other offences: winking, sexual stares, such as leering and ogling with suggestive overtones, stalking or spying on a person.

It also includes, intentional disrobing or exposure of sexual body parts or underwear, unwanted demands for sexual relations in exchange for employment, academic and other favours.

The policy has also included sexual assault and rape, cyber-based sexual harassment, such as trolling through tweets, text messages as sharing of unwanted private messages and photos on social media platforms.

Handling of cases

Under the new policy, the university has disbanded the different anti-sexual harassment committees at faculty level.

However, it has created one body dubbed the Vice-Chancellor’s Standing Roster, consisting of 100 people who will handle all cases of sexual harassment.

The Standing Roster will be co-ordinated by the gender mainstreaming department (GMD) of Makerere University.

According to a source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the faculty anti-sexual harassment committees were disbanded because they were abating sexual harassment.

“These committees were covering up for their friends, but we are optimistic that the roster will not,” the source said.

Dr Euzobia Mugisha Baine, the director of GMD, said: “The team is big and it will help us handle cases concurrently. The move will ensure that justice is not delayed.”

Hoinato, Bazeyo and dean school of engineering Makerere University Dr Dorothy Okello interacting during the launch of the regulations. This was at Royal Suites Bugolobi, yesterday. Photo by Sylvia Katushabe