**LEGAL AID GUIDELINES**

 PSJ

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**PLATFORM FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (PSJ)**

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**Authority:**

These legal Aid Guidelines are established by the Legal Services Department of Platform for Social Justice (PSJ). It shall become operative with effect from the time of reception, notification and acknowledgement of this communication by the Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) Board and Management.

**Organization Overview**

Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) is an independent, non- governmental, non partisan and not for profit making research and action centre which works locally and globally to promote justice for marginalized groups. It was formed to advocate for rights of victims of human rights abuse and to provide them with the tools to secure and defend their rights. Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) cherishes involving, initiating and encouraging government, community members and victims of human rights abuse to be part of human rights promotion, protection and advocacy processes.

**Our Vision**

ThePlatform for Social Justice (PSJ) vision is “*Empowering Rural Communities in Social Justice Systems”*

**Our Mission Statement**

To advocate for the rights of marginalized persons and foster sustainable justice in rural communities

**Our Core Values**

* *Team work, Integrity, Professionalism and Transparency*
* ***Teamwork***

In order for Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) to execute her duties, the co-operation of staff members is critical in the realization of that objective. To accomplish this value Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) will ensure;

* Staff members work as a team
* There is no promotion of individualism at the expense of the greater work
* ***Integrity***

Integrity is at the core of achieving Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) mission and ensures that Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) makes effective use of time, money and resources. It means PSJ is;

* Open, honest and straightforward in all her dealings.
* Reliable, consistent and transparent in actions and decisions.
* Accountable to all stakeholders and takes collective responsibility for all actions.
* Constantly strives against conflict if interest in order to uphold her credibility.
* ***Professionalism***

Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) will abide by principles of professional conduct, showing respect for the public and each other through these initiatives.

* Demonstrate a high standard of excellence, skill and ability in the execution of her work in order to provide quality services.
* Listen to clients and use feedback to improve our services.
* Be committed to developing the expertise and knowledge of staff in promoting administrative justice, the rule of law and good governance.
* Be rigorous, competent and efficient in dealings with all stakeholders.
* Exercise utmost confidentiality and discretion in the administration of all duties, fully respecting the oath of secrecy.

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Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) is legally registered as a non- governmental human rights organization under the Non-Governmental Organization Statute, 1989 and is duly incorporated under the Companies Act, Cap.110 as a body corporate. The Legal Aid Clinic is registered as a law firm and is directly under the Legal Department of Platform for Social Justice (PSJ).

**Mission:**

To enhance knowledge, respect and observance of human rights, promote the exchange of information and best practices through training, education, research, advocacy and strategic partnerships.

**Strategic Objectives:**

* To monitor and document human rights practices in order to promote dialogue and respect for human rights and democratic development in Uganda.
* To promote sustainable access to justice for the poor and vulnerable groups in Uganda.
* To advocate for best practices in the administration of justice.
* To build capacity of community based human rights associations to monitor, document and expose human rights violations.
* To build the civic competence of the media, local government and tertiary institutions to effectively participate in democratic processes.
* To promote electoral democracy before, during and after the general elections.
* To promote leadership development among human rights defenders.
1. **Services offered by the PSJ Legal Aid Clinic:**
* Give initial advice and assistance on any human rights violation.
* Provide a lawyer who can act on your behalf.
* Help and advice on family disputes including family mediation and arbitration.
* Legal representation in court proceedings.
* Mobile legal aid clinic. These are usually rural based.
1. **Human Resource:**

At all times the Legal Aid Clinic should have at least two (2) practicing advocates attending to clients who come to PSJ seeking legal redress.

1. **Special Projects:**

All lawyers in PSJ working on special projects should be able to dedicate sometime to assist in handling clients at the Legal Aid Clinic whenever they are called upon to. The Legal Services Manager will ensure that this process is effective**.**

All cases handled will have to be registered at the Legal Aid Clinic first before they are assigned to the lawyer available in the clinic at that time.

1. **Criteria for Cases:**

All cases registered at the clinic should be those complaints with a human rights violation. These necessitate the lawyers handling the particular case to refer to the 1995 Constitution of Uganda to ascertain if the wrong was truly founded in the Constitution.

The lawyer will need the Merits Test i.e. the likelihood of winning the case and a reasonable prospect of success and the Means Test-based on income and capital possessed by the applicant.

1. **Receiving Complaints:**

Clients will be attended to on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. Wednesday will be set aside for alternative dispute resolution i. e. mediation, negotiation and arbitration.

Friday is for the lawyers to update files and make consultations.

Legal Consultations will be done between 11am-12pm, every other Friday as the need may arise. The Legal Consultant should be invited at these meetings to offer expert advice.

1. **Procedure of receiving complaints:**
* **Interview:**

When a client comes toPlatform for Social Justice (PSJ) Legal Aid Clinic he/she will report to the front desk officer who will then direct him/her to see the lawyer available. It is the lawyers’ duty to interview the client and investigate the allegations made.

* **Walk in clients:**

 Once a client is interviewed and the facts are straight forward, he/she can be given spot on legal advice.

* **Case Registration:**

All new cases must first be registered at the Legal Aid Clinic. This will assist in effective follow up on the progress of the case.

* **Ethics:**

Lawyers should at all times act with professional integrity and in the best interest of the clients.

* **Confidentiality:**

All information and documentation provided by the client to the lawyer in trust shall be kept with utmost confidentiality. Discussion on such matter may arise only in the lawyers meeting on Fridays for expert advice. Where a client complains that the private information has been made public against his/her consent, such a lawyer will be suspended from handling that matter.

* **Filing Fees:**

All legal services provided by any of our lawyers is on pro bono basis. This means that no charge is paid by the client.

* **Referral:**

Complaints that arise from regions where Platform for Social Justice (PSJ) does not have a presence on the ground will effectively be handled by way of referral system through strategic likeminded partnerships.

* **Keeping Records:**

Each case will have its own file, number and updates on meeting notes should be regularly on the file. There will be a consolidated soft ware data system where progress on each file can be fed. This should be easily accessible and understandable to no-lawyers.

* **Amendment:**

The Legal Department reserves the right to revise the system outlined above at anytime it deems right to do so.

* **Distribution:**

The Programs Officer is responsible for the distribution of this Legal Aid Guideline. Questions relating to these Guidelines shall be directed through the Legal Department.