

Doctors announce strike, list demands



To strike. Dr Ekwaro Obuku (left), the Uganda Medical Association president, addresses doctors and journalists at the Davis Lecture Theatre at Mulago hospital in Kampala on Monday. PHOTO BY MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

Demands. The doctors want enhanced allowances, including for overtime, housing, transport, medical risk, and retention.

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KAMPALA. Doctors under their umbrella body Uganda Medical Association (UMA), have voted to go on strike at all public hospitals beginning next month unless government responds to their demands.

They listed enhanced allowances, including for overtime, housing, transport, medical risk, and retention as some of their demands.

At a stormy extraordinary meeting held at Mulago hospital in Kampala on Monday, the doctors also voted to adopt proposed salaries and allowances for all medical workers.

Although the doctors had voted to commence the strike immediately, Prof Francis Omaswa of the Medical Elder's Forum and Workers Member of Parliament, Dr Sam Lyomoki, advised them against the move.

But the UMA president, Dr Ekwaro Obuku, who walked into the Monday meeting to rapturous applause, asked the doctors to vote for industrial action.

All the doctors present voted to go on strike starting Novem-

ber 6, with only one disagreeing.

"We have waited since 1996 and that is why we are saying enough is enough...it is not yet *Uhuru* (independence) for medical doctors. Those who don't want the strike should just enter their [Toyota Land Cruisers] Prados and drive away," Dr Obuku said. The announcement coincided with Uganda's independence anniversary.

The doctors' raft of demands comes at a time when President Museveni has tasked the Public Service ministry to review and streamline all salaries of civil servants following a spate of strikes by public servants.

THE DEMANDS

Salaries. The doctors want government to review their salaries, which will see an intern doctor earn Shs8.5m per month as opposed to the current Shs960,000 before tax.

They also want a medical officer or teaching assistant to be paid Shs15m per month, accorded a two-bedroom house and a 2.5cc vehicle.

According to the demands, a senior consultant or professor will be the highest paid health worker with a gross monthly salary of Shs48m plus allowances. These will be accompanied by a five-bedroom house, 4.0cc vehicle, and three domestic workers. Currently, a senior consultant earns about Shs3.4m, consultant Shs2.6m, and a medical officer Shs1.1m. The doctors also want salaries for nurses and midwives enhanced to about Shs6.5m per month, besides a three-bedroom house, 2.0cc vehicle and one domestic worker.

The doctors said they will this week consult with the ministries of Health, Finance and Public Service but once no consensus is reached, they will not offer services starting November 6.

Other demands. They also want the State House Health Monitoring Unit disbanded and replaced with legally established health professional councils.