Kutesa sells ENHAS to a Kuwait investor

By Hope Mafaranga

A Kuwait-based airport services provider, National Aviation Services (NAS), has acquired a controlling stake in the Entebbe Handling Services (ENHAS) owned by foreign affairs minister Sam Kutesa.

ENHAS, the company that started airport operations in 1996, has hitherto been handling ground of passengers, baggage, cargo, mail and courier at Entebbe International Airport. ENHAS operates the services under a concession from the Civil Aviation Authority.

Multiple sources within the company and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) confirmed the deal, but were cagy on the fine details.

CAA's manager of public affairs Vianney Luggya said they received notification about the change of ENHAS shareholding but declined to divulge more details.

"We were notified about the change in the company's shareholding," Luggya said but added that they had no mandate to talk about internal matters of ENHAS, because it is a private company.

Sources, however, told *New Vision* that a top manager from NAS has already taken up duties at the ENHAS head office at Entebbe and the staff have already been verbally informed about the development.

Sources said Philippe Lacroix, the chief executive officer (CEO) who has been at the top of the ENHAS company for one year, is now working with the new manager from NAS of Kuwait.

"We were told last month that we will be getting new directors and that the name of the company will also change. In fact, a new manager has already come and works with our CEO, they sit in the same office," a staff of ENHAS told *New Vision* adding, however, that so far there hasn't been any other changes in the company. ENHAS also still retains its corporate colours.

Another source said the new company is currently conducting an audit before it finally takes over the operations of the company.

Sources claimed that recently, there was a meeting between the Minister of Works and Transport, Eng. Monica Azuba Ntege, the state minister of finance for investment and privatisation, Evelyn Anite the foreign affairs minister Sam Kutesa and officials from NAS and ENHAS to discuss transition to the new investor.

Efforts to get comment from Kutesa were futile by press time. *New Vision* could also not get comments from ENHAS' Elizabeth Mugumya, the public relationship officer.



ENHAS employees handle cargo for World Food Programme at Entebbe airport. Inset is Kutesa

"We were told last month that we will be getting new directors and that the name of the company will also change." Source

Azuba said she was verbally told about the matter, but added that she was yet to receive official communication.

Azuba denied having attended any meeting with Kutesa, Anite, NAS and top ENHAS management.

"I have not attended any meeting in regard to the sale of ENHAS, but I was verbally informed that the company was being sold. I have been away, let me consult my junior minister and I will get back to you," she said.

By press time, Azuba had not got back to *New Vision* on the matter.

On her part, Anite expressed ignorance about the new investor.

"I am not aware about the new investor who has taken over ENHAS and besides I am in the middle of an urgent matter, taking investors to State House to meet the President," Anite said, before referring *New Vision* to Kutesa.

"Please talk to Kutesa, he could be having more information than I do," she said before hanging up.

A knowledgeable source in the aviation industry said the entry of NAS into Uganda is a positive development.

"NAS is a big player that will bring in big investment in the sector," the source said.

NAS already operates at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) in Nairobi and Moi International Airport (MIA) in Mombasa, Kenya.

Late last month, there were reports in the media that Kutesa was seeking to sell his stake in ENHAS that serves 19 scheduled airlines and employs over 700 staff.

ENHAS was reportedly facing competition from Das Handling Services that reportedly was in charge of ground handling business for Kenya Airways, Etihad and Rwanda Air.

The acquisition of ENHAS by NAS comes amid plans by the Government to revive the national carrier. It is not clear what the change of ownership in ENHAS will mean for the revival of the national carrier.

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