MPs summon Ochola over fake Hepatitis B vaccines

BY PAUL KIWUUWA

MPs on the Parliament's committee on health have summoned the Inspector General of Police, Martin Okoth-Ochola, to offer an explanation as to how the Police intends to investigate the case of fake Hepatitis B vaccines in the country.

The above follows complaints from the National Drug Authority (NDA), that the Police has frustrated their work and failed to investigate most cases filed by NDA.

On Thursday, the same committee dismissed top Police officers who included the director of CID, Grace Akullo over lack of records regarding fake Hepatitis B vaccines cases.

Other officers dismissed are Edward Ochom, senior commissioner of Police Joseph Obwana, Assistant commissioner of Police James Kusemererwa, assistant superintendent of Police Josephine Alupo, and the acting commissioner of Police, Tinka Byarugaba.

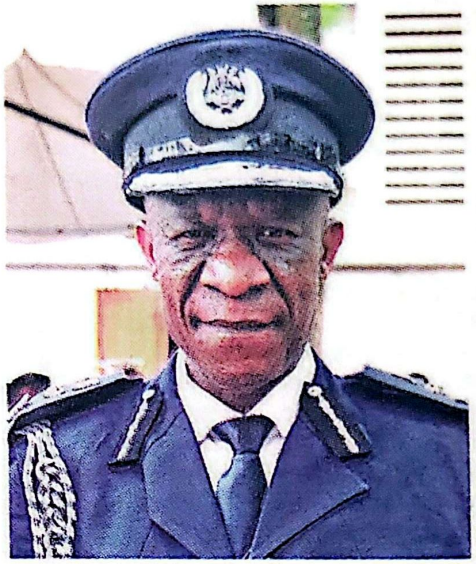
"The committee has officially invited the IGP Ochola, to tell us how he intends to investigate the increasing cases of fake Hepatitis B vaccines, because his juniors have failed to satisfy the committee on how they will deal with the hard core criminals in the pharmaceuticals and counterfeit drugs. Ochola is expected to appear before the committee next week," Michael Bukenya, the Bukuya County MP, said.

Recently, NDA revealed that it had impounded counterfeit Hepatitis B vaccines from private health facilities and two immunisation camps from different parts of the country.

The NDA has since come under fire over accusations that it has failed in its mandate to protect the public, and it pointed fingers at the Police over the failure to take action on reported cases.

Bukenya noted that the committee was shocked to note that the Police did not have extensive information on the reported cases of fake drugs on the market, including the fake Hepatitis B vaccine.

The Ntwentwe County MP, Joel Sebikaali, committee member, said: "The Police who are supposed to investigate and enforce the laws against counterfeit medicines on the market lacks the interest to do so, yet the effects of administering fake Hepatitis B vaccines may turn out to be fatal."



Martin Okoth-Ochola

On Thursday, Akullo said Byarugaba has been assigned the role of investigating the fake hepatitis B vaccines.

However, Byarugaba failed to avail them with cases of health centres and pharmacies that were recently found with the fake Hepatitis B vaccines.

"Available information indicates that all facilities found with the suspected counterfeit drugs had bought them from unlicensed dealers with fake addresses on the invoices/receipts, which is a shame on part of the Police," Sebikaali added.

The MPs want a deterring action taken against the perpetrators of the counterfeiting of drugs.

The committee vice-chairperson, Kiryandongo Woman MP, Hellen Kahunde, observed that one of the Police's mandate is to carry out investigations on the fake products on the market and drugs.

The committee ordered that the vaccination of Hepatitis B by private health centres stops immediately.

According to the NDA board chairperson, Dr. Medard Bitekyerezo, Ugandans have been vaccinated with the fake Hepatitis B vaccine from India whose content and effect on people's lives is yet to be ascertained.

Bitekyerezo revealed that the vaccines have since been impounded from many hospitals including Family Doctors' Clinic-Ntungamo, UMC Hospital-Bukoto, Malcolm Health Care-Kisaasi, Kampala Medical Chambers, Mbarara Community Hospital, Devine Mercy, Mbarara City Clinic and Mayanja Memorial Hospital.

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