Constitution."

EDITORIAL

Address deficits that make us all less safe

The latest incident in which an armed law enforcement officer snapped after expressing indignation at being on the wrong side of a power dynamic is deeply troubling. Moses Anguyo, a prison warder attached to the Uganda Prisons Service (UPS), shot dead four people at Kiboga Central Prison. Two of the victims were his supervisors. The victims have been named as Hope Catherine, the deputy officer-in-charge of Kiboga Central Prison; Bright Akishuri, the third in command; and Sarah Ayebare, the wife of the officer in charge of the UPS facility. Mr Anguyo is believed to have been angry and resentful of a verbal reprimand he received for using his phone in a manner deemed contrary to prison regulations.

The prison warder's gung-ho reaction killed a child, the fourth victim, unfortunate to be in the line of fire. The child was hospitalised but succumbed to the bullet wounds.

The aforementioned shooting incident, in all its goriness, is not the exception but the rule. A litany of cases offer support, but we will revisit only a couple of them.

The issue:
Crime

Our view:
We call upon State actors to bend every effort to ensure that law enforcement officers possess the mental, emotional, and physical fitness to handle the responsibility of a firearm.

In 2023, Ivan Wabwire, a police constable (PC) at the time, shot dead Uttam Bhandari, a moneylender, after failing to service a debt north of Shs2 million. It would later come to light that the Uganda Police Force (UPF) knew about PC Wabwire's mental health issues. A decision was taken to disarm Mr Wabwire after he was twice committed to Butabika National Referral Mental Hospital shortly after joining the Force in 2018. As well as not screening recruits for mental health conditions, the UPF admitted to embarrassing lapses that saw Mr Wabwire steal a fellow PC's firearm on the day he committed a heinous crime.

Still, in 2023, Pte Wilson Sabiiti, a national army soldier, shot dead Col (rtd) Charles Okello Engola, then a junior Labour minister, after the two failed to have a meeting of minds.

These rather disturbing cases raise pertinent questions about whether law enforcement officers have the requisite emotional intelligence to operate effectively and with public confidence in stressful situations.

An unvarnished assessment indicates that there are way too many rough edges that demand urgent action. It is quite evident—even to the uninitiated eye—that the body of knowledge our law enforcement officers religiously receive is devoid of physical and psychological evaluation. Continuing to gloss over such a key training component (i.e. physical and psychological evaluation) is injudicious. This, as we have seen time and again, is not without consequences.

We, therefore, call upon State actors to bend every effort to ensure law enforcement officers possess the mental, emotional, and physical fitness to handle the responsibility of a firearm. The mental health crisis that is currently buffeting the country cannot be reduced to a footnote if anything because it is a clear and present danger.

The country's law enforcement officers evidently still have a lot to learn insofar gaining a mastery over techniques for de-escalating tense situations and intervening in crises appropriately is concerned. A proactive approach will go a long way in realigning their decision-making under stress.

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