

EDITORIAL

We demand govt action to end doctors' strike

Today is the third day of the strike by medical officers in the employment of Uganda government. They want their salaries increased and, relative to grade, to be chauffeured to work and afforded other perks such as a domestic worker and housing.

At Makerere University, the academic staff has put administrators on notice that they will stop working unless their pay is revised upwards and incentive arrears from July 2015 cleared.

There is the concurrent industrial action by prosecutors, and before them, judicial officers. Strike by teachers over pay has been intermittent, triggered by the government's unfulfilled commitments.

We consider these to be shameful indictment of an unresponsive government. The civil service is the oxygen for proper functioning of State and the primary vehicle for elected leaders to implement manifesto and deliver services to citizens.

The issue:

Doctors' strike

Our view:

Whereas we welcome the stampede to kick to life a Salary Review Commission to harmonise pay for all public officials, we demand a stop-gap measure to persuade the doctors to halt the strike.

The alternative is underpaid or unpaid bureaucrats charging unauthorised payments on service-seekers; taking bribes, or engaging in private work at the expense of the taxpayer.

In our view, therefore, is that the citizen loses in multiple ways: Bears the burden of tax for no or less-than-satisfactory government services, offers inducements to civil servants to do that they are employed to do and or suffers the ignominy of being ignored or deprived of key services.

Put another way, Uganda has degenerated to a level where private citizens have to convert otherwise free public services through inducements to officials in order to enjoy them! That is perilous and plain disgraceful.

It excludes vulnerable, but deserving citizens, most children, women and the elderly, from critical services, turning their predicament into life-threatening situations.

This is why we find it depraved that the government that has good money to throw after bad politicking, in this case a rush to scrap presidential age limit, cannot provide required resourcing for doctors' welfare and medical supplies.

Unlike previous instances, the doctors' industrial action is about life and death. It can be a mass death sentence since patients are already being turned away or not attended to at some public health facilities.

Other health workers such as nurses may handle some, but not all cases. A doctor is an essential part of the curative care chain. Those with means, a tiny segment of the population, can find relief at private hospitals. The government derives authority from, and acts in the interest of, the majority.

Whereas we welcome the efforts to fast-track a Salary Review Commission to harmonise pay for all public officials, we demand a stop-gap measure to persuade the doctors to halt the strike. For strikes signal a loss of trust in government.

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