

Government officials have asked Ugandans in Iran to alert community leaders of their whereabouts, stay indoors and monitor the media for developments.

BY FRANKLIN DRAKU

As the US/Israel-Iran war rages on, the government is struggling to ascertain how many Ugandans have been trapped and how to evacuate them.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an advisory to its citizens in Iran, urging them to remain indoors and said Uganda is monitoring the situation.

Officials from the ministry also said the government has no data on how many Ugandans are in Iran because many go on their own do not register their presence with the embassy, and warned that planning for their evacuation would be difficult without the data.

Statistics from the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development show that from 2016 to 2024, at least 223,102 domestic and professional migrant workers have left the country for the Middle East. Of these, only 32,876 are engaged in professional jobs, with 190,226 recruited as domestic workers. Saudi Arabia takes a lion's share of 131,970 workers; UAE, 45,636; and Qatar, 12,620.

Mr Vincent Waiswa Bagire, the Foreign Affairs ministry permanent secretary, in the advisory warned Ugandans to take precautions and wait for the volatile situation to ease.

"In light of the escalating security situation, all Ugandan citizens in the territory of Iran, who can, are advised to take serious precautions for their safety and leave Iran through any possible means. Government of Uganda has taken the decision to withdraw all non-essential staff from the Embassy in Tehran for their safety. Consular services are severely limited for the time being as alternative arrangements are put in place," the statement read in part.

The United States of America and Israel on Saturday launched coordinated airstrikes on Tehran that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in his office. Several other senior government and military leaders have also reportedly been killed in the airstrikes.

Mr Bagire urged Ugandans in Iran to alert community leaders of their whereabouts, stay indoors and monitor the media for developments.



Smoke rises from Tehran City following an explosion, after Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran on Saturday. PHOTO/REUTERS

What next for Ugandans trapped in the Iran war?

abouts, stay indoors and monitor the media for developments.

"Information about evacuations will be limited until the situation normalises. Due to the extremely fluid situation affecting international travel, all Ugandan citizens are strongly advised to suspend travel to the Middle East until further notice," Mr Bagire said.

Mr Henry Oryem Okello, the minister State for Foreign Affairs, yesterday accused Ugandans in the diaspora of refusing to make their presence known to its foreign missions and said they only do so when in distress.

He said while many Ugandans travel for private businesses and employment, it is only right that they register their

STRIKE ON A SCHOOL

At least 153 people, including children died yesterday after a reported strike hit a school in southern Iran, according to Iranian officials. Iran has blamed the US and Israel. The US military's Central Command (Centcom) said it was looking into reports of the incident, while Israel's military said it was "not aware" of any IDF operations in the area. Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian called the incident a "barbaric act".

presence with Uganda's foreign missions so they can be easily helped during emergencies.

"Ugandans have a very bad habit of not registering with our embassies or our consulates when they are abroad and only start calling and pleading for help when such dire situations arise, which is wrong," Mr Oryem Okello said.

"I always advise that Ugandans should immediately register with the embassy or the consulate so that in such events, we can know where you are and will evacuate you," he added.

The minister said many Ugandans who go out think it is their money that took them out and that no one should bother them when they facilitated their

own movements.

"They claim it's their money that took them abroad and why should President Museveni be following them? It's not a question of President Museveni, it's your own safety. So in this particular case, we have given a warning to all Ugandans. We hope that during the next few days we will be able to assess and evaluate a few things," he said.

Mr Oryem Okello said while the government is striving to evacuate Ugandans from Tehran, previous experience has shown something different. He said during the war in Afghanistan, and the bombing of Tehran by Israel and America last year, many Ugandans refused to be evacuated for fear that they would lose their jobs.

"When we wanted to evacuate Ugandans from Afghanistan, they refused. They said if you evacuate us, we will not be able to come back to our jobs. So they prefer to stay there, take the risk in order to continue with their work," he added.

But Mr Oryem Okello said, "If any Ugandans want to be evacuated, then we will see how to either directly as the government or jointly with neighboring countries like Kenya or Tanzania or ask some international organisations to assist us evacuate them from. But those who choose to stay in the country, we will have no control because it will be their choice," he said.