

Oulanyah irked by handling of nodding disease syndrome

By Moses Mulondo
and John Odyek

The Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Oulanyah, on Friday suspended the House, sending it into a recess over the Government's failure to provide emergency funds for treating victims of the nodding disease.

On Wednesday, after a heated debate that lasted for about three hours, Parliament directed the Executive to provide the sh1.2b required to run the two treatment centres for the victims in northern Uganda.

The two centres were started by Hope for Humans, an American non-governmental organisation, which withdrew after the Government failed to provide funds for running the centres.

The state minister for health, Sarah Opendi, on Wednesday informed Parliament that out of the sh1.8b the Government had allocated towards the facilitation of teams managing the disease, only sh257m could be accounted for.

Finance state minister David Bahati told Parliament that the Ministry of Finance could find money to fund only interventions against the nodding disease because they could not release any money before getting a written request from the health ministry. Bahati said there seems to be some hiccups in the health ministry.

Oulanyah on Friday read a letter from the health ministry permanent secretary indicating that they did not have funds for the nodding disease, but would request the Government to ensure the money is provided in the next financial year of 2018/2019.

"As you have heard, the letter from the health ministry has nothing to do with the emergency measures that have been done. What this means is that the victims

Oulanyah suspended Parliament last week in protest over nodding disease. Photo by Kennedy Oryema



MEMBERS BACK OULANYAH

Adolf Mwesige, defence minister: This is not acceptable. How can the permanent secretary fail to comply with what we agreed here in Parliament? They are busy involved in infighting as the victims are suffering. We have to be serious about the plight of these children. You can see how frustrated the Deputy Speaker is.

Charles Bakkabulindi, sports state minister: Sh1.2b is a small amount of money which the

health ministry could even have provided through re-allocations. Can't we as Government take over. This is terrible.

Elijah Okupa, Kasilo County MP: Government officials were not sensitive to the needs of the population. "How can the permanent secretary in the health ministry be so arrogant and say the money will only be released next year, yet the children are dying?"

will continue in a helpless situation," a visibly disappointed Oulanyah said.

According to statistics from the health ministry, there are 2,143 nodding disease affected children, 137 of whom have died due to insufficient medical attention.

It is on that basis that the apparently angered Oulanyah sent Parliament into recess until March 27, barely a week after it had just returned from another period of recess.

The suspension, some budget experts

explained, will affect the budgeting process because most of the budget ministerial statements had not been presented.

The Public Finance Management Act requires all ministries and other public entities to present their budget policy statements by March 15.

On Thursday, which was the deadline, only three entities out of 236 had presented their statements. They included the ministries of public service, defence and the Parliamentary Commission.

After Oulanyah had moved out of the chambers after suspending the House, the five ministers who had been around engaged in a discussion with some few MPs looking puzzled. The ministers were Adolf Mwesige (defence), Muruli Mukasa (public service), Charles Bakkabulindi (sports state minister) and the state minister for primary education, Rosemary Sseninde.

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