

The leaders were arrested for allegedly inciting violence among their colleagues who were protesting poor working conditions.

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The Ugandan government has released two leaders of the long-distance truck drivers a day after their colleagues blockaded Uganda's border entry points with Kenya, paralyzing transport operations.

Truck drivers parked hundreds of vehicles in protest against the arrest of their leaders, including Mr Sudi Kauli Mwatela, chairperson of the Long Distance Drivers Union, by Ugandan security agencies in northern Uganda.

No trucks entered Uganda through the Malaba, Busia, Suam and Lwakhakha border points, causing supply chain disruptions and losses to cargo owners and governments.

Uganda Police spokesperson Rusoke Kituuma confirmed the release of the drivers' leaders.

"The leaders of truck drivers were inciting violence among the transporters not to drive to South Sudan, yet they had agreed to call off the strike over a range of issues they were dissatisfied with in South Sudan. They were arrested at our border in Elegu, but they have since been released," he said on Monday.

The blockade followed the arrest of Mr Mwatela and two colleagues on Sunday at the Uganda-South Sudan border

Police release truck drivers' leaders, ease border trade



Kenyan truck drivers welcome their leader, Mr Sudi Kauli Mwatela (raising hands) at Malaba border moments after Ugandan police freed and handed him back to the Kenyan authorities on Monday. PHOTO/JOSEPH OMOLLO

town of Elegu after they addressed truck drivers engaged in a sit-down strike over harassment, insecurity, and illegal charges in South Sudan.

The drivers demanded the release of their leaders before lifting the blockade.

Mr Kituuma said truckers resumed operations at the Uganda-Kenya border points after the leaders were freed.

The Chairperson of the Uganda Clearing and Forwarding Association, Mr Pe-

ter Sireka Namalwa, said the strike had disrupted operations at borders.

"We have hundreds of trucks stuck in both Kenya and Uganda after drivers parked in protest over the arrests of their colleagues and leaders," Mr Sireka said.

Most strikes on the Northern Corridor — from the Port of Mombasa through Uganda to the hinterland — have stemmed from tariff and non-tariff barriers, insecurity and deteriorating road

conditions.

A week ago, truck drivers blockaded the Uganda-South Sudan border, protesting harassment, insecurity, illegal fees and poor road conditions on the Nimule-Juba highway and beyond.

On Sunday, Mr Mwatela and other truck drivers' leaders travelled to South Sudan, where they met South Sudanese officials and Uganda Revenue Authority representatives to resolve the impasse.

Mr Waema Gishinga, another drivers' leader, claimed South Sudanese soldiers surrounded the delegation and pressured them into signing an agreement ending the strike.

He added that three leaders were later arrested by Ugandan security personnel while explaining the circumstances under which the agreement was signed.

Some drivers accused Ugandan officials of colluding with South Sudanese authorities and accepting bribes to endorse the agreement.

However, Mr Isaac Katabazi, the chairperson of the Regional Truck Transformation Initiative, denied the allegations, saying all parties, including Kenyan transport representatives, had agreed to end the strike. "The truck drivers have called off the strike. The trucks have resumed journeys to South Sudan," he said.

NEW AGREEMENT

Under the agreement, South Sudan committed to implementing 15 measures. These include removing unnecessary roadblocks on the Juba-Nimule highway, scrapping illegal immigration charges and cancelling unlawful fees imposed on empty crates and containers.