

AN OFFICIAL FROM NAKASERO BLOOD BANK ASKED UGANDANS TO DONATE BLOOD EVERY THREE MONTHS

By Jerome Kule Bitswande

Pakistan association joins blood donation drive

In a humanitarian gesture, Pakistan nationals living in Uganda spent the better part of their Saturday donating blood to help alleviate the current blood shortage in the country.

The blood donation, which took place at Down Coin Car bond in Kyambogo, Kampala was organised by the Pakistan Association of Uganda.

According to Skindar Iftikhar Cheema, the chairman of the association, they felt compelled to organise a one-day blood donation camp following news of a shortage of blood in the country.

"We are part of Uganda and East Africa. What happens to the nationals here also affects us," he said.

He added that since Pakistanis do a lot of business in Uganda, they have an interest in the health of Ugandans who are their customers.

Agha Aslam, one of the Pakistanis who took part in the drive, said the association decided to organise such camps as part of their contribution to improving humanity in Uganda.

Aslam noted that the donation was not only for Ugandans, but also for themselves since they, too, can be beneficiaries at the time of need.

About 200 Pakistanis donated blood.

Joyce Helga Nassuna from Nakasero Blood Bank hailed the Pakistanis for the gesture.



Pakistan Association of Uganda chairman Sikandar Iftikhar leading the Pakistani community in blood donation at Kyambogo, Kampala. Photo by Ronnie Kijjambu

"I am very happy about the turnout. It was overwhelming," she said, adding that this should be a challenge to some Ugandans of good health who

hardly donate blood. She urged Ugandans to donate blood regularly if they are to curb the blood shortages in the country.

"Many Ugandans donate blood, but there is need to donate more because the demand for blood increases every day," she said.

The critical shortage of blood that Uganda has been grappling with has put patients' lives at risk. Only a month ago, Nakasero Blood Bank was almost empty with a paltry 150 units of blood in stock.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

Iftikhar said since Pakistanis do a lot of business in Uganda, they have an interest in the health of Ugandans who are their customers.

This is not enough to meet requirements of a city that hosts over 1.5 million people with high levels of accidents arising from increasing use of bodabodas.

Uganda needs at least 340,000 units of safe blood annually, but usually only collects 200,000 a year, hardly 60% of the total blood needed in the country.

But the mobilisation for blood donation this year is expected to reduce following budget cuts to Uganda Blood Transfusion

Services (UBTS).

This was worsened with the withdrawal of PEPPAR funds which accounted for approximately 45% of the UBTS budget.

Experts have also argued that over-reliance on students for blood donations was partly to blame for the cyclic blood shortage.

However, Nassuna believes that if the gesture by the Pakistan Association could be emulated by all people, the country would make great strides in the collection of the required blood.

She said males with safe blood ought to donate once every three months while females should do the same every four months.

Nassuna also said Ugandans ought to be alive to the fact that blood lasts only 35 days, thus the need for donate blood frequently.

Kareem Wozur, a car broker at Tadashi Bond, committed himself to always donating blood every three months.

Wozur said he was challenged by the fact that foreigners were thinking of the health of Ugandans.

"I thank the Pakistanis for this blood donation; it is like offering life to another person," he said.

Safe blood is used for transfusion into people that have lost a lot of blood, especially after accidents and serious illnesses.