

GULU

By Arnest Tumwesige

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) manager for upcountry airports, Samuel Wonekha, has told Members of Parliament that over sh196b is required to upgrade Gulu Airport to international standards.

He told the legislators on Parliament's infrastructure committee that Gulu Airport is the second-biggest, after Entebbe International Airport. The MPs were inspecting the airport last week.

Wonekha said the airport is strategically located in terms of the economy and geo-politics.

He told the lawmakers that in case there is a problem at Entebbe Airport, Gulu Airport can be used as an alternative. However, it does not have runway lights to facilitate night operations.

Recently, the CAA bought about 60 hectares of land at sh2.8b to supplement the 321 hectares already available.

However, Wonekha expressed concern over encroachment on the land by their partner agency, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC).

He explained that when Gulu town was hit by water scarcity, NWSC opened a second dam, Oitino II, and some pipes were laid on the airport land without their consent.

"They have also erected electricity lines near the airport that extend to the dam, which poses a big threat to aircrafts during landing," he said.

Wonekha said any activity near the airport must be approved by the CAA. He asked the MPs to come up with a law on activities around aerodromes.

Over sh190b needed to upgrade Gulu Airport



Legislators about to board a plane after inspecting Gulu Airport last week. Photo by Arnest Tumwesige

Capt. David Livingstone Waiswa from Gulu Airport said they have six sections and 27 staff members, including a representative of the President's office.

Waiswa noted that in September, October and November, Gulu Airport handled 149,255 and 200 in and out flights, respectively.

He, however, noted that while the operations are going

on smoothly, they face power blackouts, which affects their work. "We have two standby generators, but their batteries are depleted, thus the power backup cannot work well," he said.

MP William Nzoghu (Busongora County North) queried CAA on how powerlines were erected without raising objection.

Nzoghu, who is also the

shadow minister of works, said airport operations are premised on the security of passengers.

The legislators learnt that the matter was raised, but the Gulu resident district commissioner blocked the process and okayed the erection of the powerlines.

Bbaale County MP George Wilson Nsamba Kumama, who is the vice-chairperson of the committee on infrastructure, said the findings of their

inspection of all airports will inform the ongoing process of the amendment of the CAA Act.

Kumama said as plans are underway to revive Uganda Airlines, proper systems must be put in place to ensure secure flights within and out of the country.

The MPs also inspected the Kasese, Soroti and Tororo airports.