

# Striking doctors enemies of the State, says Museveni

**Awarded.**  
President Museveni (centre) poses with some of the medalists during the Labour Day celebrations in Sembabule District yesterday.  
PHOTO BY RPU



**Faulted.** The President accused the health workers of blackmail and behaving unprofessionally.

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**SEMBABULE.** President Museveni yesterday revisited the touchy subject of doctors strike and angrily described the medics who downed their tools at the end of last year as “enemies of Uganda who should be treated as such”.

Doctors across the country downed their tools for three weeks last November demanding that government fulfils a raft of demands that included improved salaries, better perks cushioned with provisions of housing, vehicles, domestic workers, and also disbandment or restructuring of the State House-run Health Monitoring Unit.

Other burning issues the doctors demanded to be handled were consistent stocking of medicines and medical supplies, better welfare and quality training for Interns and senior house officers (doctors pursuing graduate studies).

The strike paralysed healthcare services throughout the country and saw some patients die due to failure or delayed access to medication.

This deadlock forced the government to toy with the contentious scheme of importing 200 doctors from Cuba to replace the striking doctors.

But speaking at the Labour Day celebrations in Sembabule District yesterday, Mr Museveni spiritedly defended the controversial plan by government to import the doctors, accusing Ugandan medics of blackmail and “behaving badly and unprofessionally”.

The day was marked under the theme ‘Promoting Public Spirit in Public Sector.’

“I wanted to bring Cuban doctors because ours behaved very badly and unprofessionally. They started striking, incited other doctors and left our patients to die. They were blackmailing us,” President Museveni said.

“A doctor who goes on strike is not a doctor, he is an enemy of our people and we shall

treat him as such. In fact, I wanted to go back to the bush, but I was restrained,” he added.

Mr Museveni often at critical moments threatens to return to the bush to wage another guerrilla war, similar to the successful one he fought between 1981 and 1986, against the Milton Obote II regime, and military junta led by Generals Tito Okello and Bazilio Okello.

Mr Museveni, and his largely ragtag bush fighters, eventually capture State power on January 26, 1986.

The President also revisited his pet topic of self-sacrifice and service to country, saying: “I am the President of Uganda; the President of Uganda gets Shs3.6m. And even the Shs3.6m, I accepted it in 1996 because the MPs tricked me. I was getting Shs150,000 from 1986-1996. There are some public servants who get Shs40m, Shs60m. Try to challenge my authority and you will see. Authority does not depend on salary.”

Mr Museveni’s sharp response was triggered by an earlier speech by Mr Wilson Usher Owere, the chairman general National Organisation of Trade Unions (Notu).

#### Workers’ petition

Mr Owere had argued that since government had improved key infrastructure, including roads by 70 per cent, it was now pressing that government focuses on raising salaries of civil servants.

Mr Owere had also challenged that non-motivated labour would frustrate Uganda’s economic take off stage. The Notu boss also notified President Museveni against poor counsel by his ministers on import of the Cuban doctors.

“I don’t see any need of them [Cuban doctors] and you should be serious with your ministers. They just want to create for you problems. They want to financially benefit from the Cuban doctors project. *Bagala kukuba njawulo* [loosely translated as make profit],” he warned.

But Mr Museveni in a terse tone waved off Mr Owere’s and other critics suggestions.

“I, therefore, do not want to hear that nonsense because every decision we make is first pondered about before we resolve it and you

cannot lecture me about public service in Uganda,” he said.

Mr Owere and a team unionists have in the last couple of weeks traversed the country informing civil servants of a pending industrial action slated for June 23 should government not consider their proposal to enhance salaries of all civil servants across the board by 255 per cent in the next five years.

But Mr Museveni yesterday castigated those who stage strikes over low pay, saying he is one of the public servants paid a low salary.

President Museveni said as proposed in the next Budget (2018/2019), his government will only enhance salaries for selected civil servants such as doctors and science teacher while others will be considered in subsequent budgets. Mr Museveni also dismissed as selfish the agitation to enhance civil servants pay across the board, saying government still has other pressing priorities to tackle, including roads.

The government says the expatriate doctors will work as specialists in hard-to-reach stations that are not attractive to the local medical personnel.

But the proposal has been opposed by the Ugandan Medical Association on grounds that Ugandan doctors can ably do the work that the Cuban doctors are being imported to do.

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#### CUBAN DOCTORS’ ISSUE

The opposition to the import of doctors notwithstanding, government has gone ahead to enter a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Cuban government with each Cuban doctor to be paid about \$1,500 (about Shs5.4m) per month, but a local senior consultant doctor will get Shs4.5m per month.

The Parliament’s Health Committee is yet to discuss the matter with some MPs on the committee opposed to the importation of Cuban doctors.

State Minister for Health Sarah Opendi is expected to defend the proposal before the committee at a yet-to-be scheduled date.