

Over 200 learners stranded as fire destroys dormitory

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BY ALEXASHABA

A total of 215 students of Ntenungi Secondary School in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District, lack accommodation after their dormitory was destroyed by fire on Tuesday night.

The fire broke out at around 8pm, according to school authorities, and is suspected to have been deliberately set by unknown people.

The incident report released by Rwenzori West Police Region Spokesperson Vincent Twesige said the fire had engulfed the school dormitory by the time the police rescue team arrived at school.

"Rescue team immediately responded to the scene; however, while en route they were informed that the structure had already been completely burnt down and that students, with the help of nearby residents and area police personnel, had managed to extinguish the fire and salvage some property," he told *Daily Monitor* yesterday.

Mr Twesige said a team from the Rwenzori West Regional Fire Prevention and Rescue Services visited and examined the scene on Wednesday.

"It was established that the fire de-



The dormitory that was burnt at Ntenungi Secondary School in Kamwenge District on Tuesday night. PHOTO/COURTESY

stroyed a building housing two dormitories accommodating about 210 students. Fortunately, no deaths or serious injuries were registered," he said.

Mr Twesige added that preliminary findings indicate that the fire is suspected to have been caused by arson because the solar power system and batteries installed in the building remained intact, and the

fire reportedly spread rapidly from one of the rooms near the doorway before engulfing the entire dormitory.

"Police have since launched investigations to establish the exact cause of the fire and identify any persons who may have been involved. We urge members of the public to remain calm and cooperate with police by providing any information that may assist in the ongoing investigations," he said.

**Shs200m
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The school head teacher, Mr Burnnet Niwagaba, said the fire destroyed all the students' belongings, including books, bedding, and personal items. Results slips of some of the Senior Four candidates were also burnt.

"By the time the fire started, all the learners were in evening prep. No student was inside the dormitory. We suspect that some arsonists could have set the dormitory on fire. The building has no electricity; we only use the solar system. Unfortunately, we were unable to rescue any of the students' property, but

no learner was injured," Mr Niwagaba said.

He explained that the school now needs about Shs200m to replace students' belongings that were destroyed. The amount, however, does not include the cost of reconstructing the dormitory.

The head teacher said the school is now struggling to accommodate the affected learners.

"On Tuesday night, after the incident, we improvised and allowed the students to sleep in one of the classrooms. They shared a few mattresses that we managed to obtain from outside. At the moment, we don't know where to start in rebuilding the dormitory because it needs to be demolished and constructed afresh," Mr Niwagaba said.

He now appeals to well-wishers and the government for support, saying sending the learners home could disrupt their education.

The head teacher also noted that the fire came at a difficult time when the school is already facing financial challenges after the suspension of funding that had been supporting teachers' salaries.

Previously, Finn Church Aid had been paying salaries for 24 teachers with support from a programme funded by the United States government under the United States Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration (PRM).

However, the funding stopped recently, forcing the school to rely on contributions from the parents-teachers association (PTA) to pay the salaries of teachers.

Despite the suspension of funding, the Country Director of Finn Church Aid, Mr Wycliffe Nshaka, said: "We are in close contact with our officials from our global head office in Finland. They have a disaster response fund, and we hope to mobilise some resources to support the school. Once we receive feedback, we shall communicate with the school next week."

The school, which was established in 2022 by non-governmental organisation Finn Church Aid (FCA), serves both host community learners and refugees in the settlement. The school currently has an enrolment of 1,012 students.