By John Musenze

EBOLA: UGANDA CLOSES DR CONGO BORDER, BANS UNREGULATED GATHERINGS

In an effort to prevent the spread of Ebola, the Government has suspended mass gatherings and fully closed Uganda's border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. The new measures were contained in a statement that was issued by the Ministry of Health permanent secretary, Dr Diana Atwine, yesterday.

"The following non-structured gatherings and activities that are likely to attract large crowds, uncontrolled movement, prolonged physical interaction, excessive physical excretion and close contact are hereby suspended until further notice," the statement read.

The suspended gatherings include music concerts, public rallies, cultural festivals, commemorative events, marathons, walkathons and similar activities that involve prolonged physical exertion, increased sweating and close crowd interactions. Resident district/city commissioners and security agencies have also been tasked with ensuring the strict guidelines' enforcement.


Dr Atwine

PRECAUTION

The latest move comes amid increasing concern over the worsening Ebola outbreak in eastern DR Congo that has 220 suspected deaths and over 700 suspected cases, while Uganda has so far confirmed seven cases, including two health workers.

"The security forces are sealing our entire border with the DRC, until further notice. No movement of people between the two countries is permitted. This is in response to the Ebola outbreak in DRC. Trying to breach this order will endanger your life. We will update you on the situation as it develops," stated Chief of Defence Forces Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, in a message shared on his X handle, yesterday.

BORDER CLOSED

Relatedly, the National Task Force on Ebola Response, chaired by Vice-President Jessica Alupo, yesterday reached the decision to close Uganda's border with the DR Congo, which is battling a large-scale outbreak of the deadly Ebola Bundibugyo strain.

Atwine said the temporary border closure takes immediate effect for four weeks and will only allow limited essential movements.

"Uganda is temporarily closing the border with the DR Congo with immediate effect," the task force statement read.

Atwine clarified that only authorised Ebola response teams, humanitarian operations, food and cargo transportation and essential security personnel will be permitted to cross between Uganda and the DR Congo.

Immigration teams have been directed to enforce strict health screening measures, including mandatory documentation, completion of locator forms and continuous monitoring at all official entry points.

"All authorised entrants shall be subjected to strict health screening, completion of locator forms, documentation, and continuous monitoring at all ports of entry in accordance with Ministry of Health surveillance protocols," she informed.

"Any person returning from the DR Congo into Uganda shall undergo mandatory self-isolation for 21 days under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and district surveillance teams, so we are asking the immigration to help us with all necessary information and notifications about these passengers," the task force further directed.

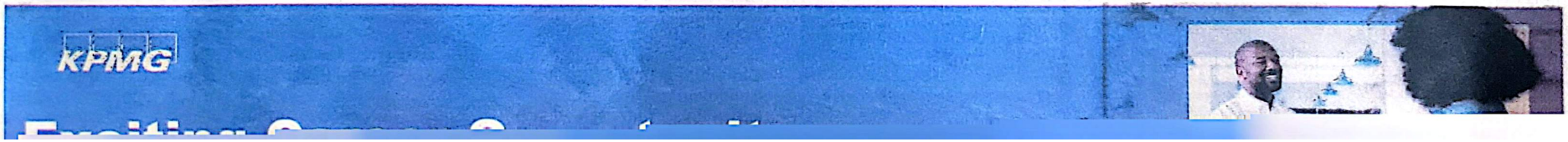
SAFEGUARDING LEARNERS

School authorities have been instructed to identify learners who recently returned from the DR Congo and monitor their body temperatures daily for 21 days as part of enhanced surveillance measures.

"Schools in border districts shall remain open. They must strictly observe all Ministry of Health standard operating procedures. However, students or children who come from DR Congo will be affected because we are closing all movements immediately," the statement said.

District authorities along the Uganda-DR Congo border have additionally been directed to designate at least one health facility to isolate and monitor learners who develop Ebola-like symptoms, such as fever, during the observation period.

Atwine noted that Uganda is still in negotiations with DR Congo and all other stakeholders so that it can send health workers to DR Congo to help contain the outbreak.



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