

Students' body wants govt intervention over high fees

By Benon Ojiambo

As the opening of the first term for the 2018 academic year gets closer, students have called on the Government to intervene over the high fees being charged particularly by private schools.

The call was made by the top executive of the Uganda National Students Association (UNSA) during a press conference held at Ham Shopping Centre in Makerere, Kampala last week.

Winifred Nakandi, the UNSA president, said though there have been complaints from parents and students about the high fees charged by the private schools, little has been done by the Government to reverse the trend.

"Private schools have continued to charge exorbitant school fees. Parents are crying. This shouldn't continue because it is affecting Uganda's

education system and we find it very discriminative," Nakandi said.

"Unfortunately, such issues can hardly be addressed because the people we would cry out to are also beneficiaries because they directly or indirectly own these schools," she said, declining to name some of the people she was referring to.

Under a liberal education system, so many private schools that are academically strong are increasingly becoming expensive and public schools are equally in the same basket. Some nursery, primary and secondary schools are charging over sh1m as tuition fees per term, besides other requirements, such as cement, brooms, reams of paper and toilet paper.

However, students said the Government must not just look on as private schools continue charging exorbitantly for their services, but must intervene to find a middle

ground.

They say though there are different organisations that fight for the interests of their members, such as Uganda Medical Association and Uganda National Teachers Union that fight for medical workers and teachers' interests, parents do not have any.

"We have decided to come out and help fight for parents who have to pay the high fees," Nakandi said.

They also reason that they have witnessed the Government and Parliament responding to other issues affecting the people, like charging businessmen rent in dollars and wondered why the issue of school fees "looks to be beyond government's reach".

Committee instituted

Following outcries and complaints from members of the public over the same issue, the education ministry constituted a committee last August

to study fees structures in both government and private schools.

Recommendations expected

The committee is expected to make recommendations to guide the Government on regulating charges in the learning institutions across the country.

Last February, First Lady and education minister Janet Museveni directed all schools to submit to the ministry their budgets for the preceding three years. The schools were also tasked with seeking permission from the ministry's permanent secretary before increasing fees.

Aggrey Kibenge, the ministry's undersecretary, said they issued a circular in October last year, addressed to all local governments, headteachers, local authorities and other stakeholders in both public and private schools prohibiting the

increment of fees during this year.

He explained that the circular was issued in good time for purposes of preparing all stakeholders since the previous academic year was nearing its end so that the schools would have no reason not to plan adequately.

Fees increment prohibited

"Through the circular, the ministry prohibited the increase of fees in both public and private schools during 2018 without written authorisation from the permanent secretary in the case of secondary schools and the chief administrative officer or town clerks in the case of primary schools," Kibenge said.

"The procedures were prescribed that should the schools after the management committees feel that there is a need to review their budgets, they shall submit it to the relevant authorities for approval," Kibenge added.