

BY DERRICK WANDERA
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

Student's hand chopped off after tear gas blast

KAMPALA. With three weeks to promotional examinations, 17-year-old Musafalu Kamakya concentrated on reading to obtain the finest scores at Happy Times Secondary School in Kampala.

Last Friday, after dinner, he headed to his bedroom to revise his notes before catching sleep.

There was, however, a strange object that he saw on the reading table. Holding a cup of tea aloft with a right hand, he lifted the tin and returned to the living room to inquire from the grandmother what it was.

Their conversation was abruptly cut short by a blast. In a split second, the teenager's fingers were shredded and blood dripped uncontrollably.

Kamakya dropped the can and howled. The din and sight of blood dazed the grandmother. It was unsightly, frightening. The container was an unexploded tear gas can. The damage prompted them to race to the nearby Kiruddu Hospital, a

satellite branch of Mulago National Referral Hospital in Munyonyo.

It remains unclear how the explosive ended in the teenager's room.

Hours before the incident, there had been a running battle in the neighborhood between police and Opposition supporters, who had gathered to attend a rally against attempts to amend Article 102(b) of the Constitution to remove presidential age limit.

In the fracas, anti-riot police indiscriminately fired shots and tear gas in Masajja, Makindye Division, to disperse the unrelenting crowd. It is believed one of the tear gas canisters dropped into Kamakya's room through an open window. Doctors at Kiruddu Hospital were unable to handle the damage the blast had caused to Kamakya, and referred him to Mulago main hospital.

At Mulago Hospital, doctors said there was only one way out to save the teenager's life: amputate the injured arm.

The student yesterday lay on the bed with a heavily bandaged hand, wailing.

Ruined dream

Besides the excruciating pain, Kamakya worries about how a community that knew him as a physically-fit teenager would receive him.

"I have been a good footballer with my school team and at a football academy but I am not sure I will continue playing," he said, adding: "I am a hardworking person who uses both hands, now that I don't have one anymore, I don't know what will happen with me."

Both he and mother, Ms. Nasaka Salima, broke down; the hospital bills too are overwhelming.

"We have so far used a lot of money despite the fact this is a government hospital. Even the process of getting treated in itself is too tedious," she said.

The family says it has so far spent Shs750,000 over two days.

"We are seeking for any kind of help that can be sent to us because we are still paying more money," said Mr Muhammed Mbuga, the teenager's father.

Kampala Metropolitan deputy police spokesperson Luke Owoyesigire, says they are investigating the matter and could extend support to the distraught family if they establish that one of their officers was culpable.

"Of course, we don't condone mistakes and if we find out the officer who did it, he will be punished," Mr Oyesigire says, adding: "Where deemed fit, we shall have to see how to help this family."

Asked if all personal deployed to handle public demonstrations are adequately trained in crowd control, Mr Oyesigire said they train everyone assigned to handle weapons and explosives.

"We can't just give this equipment to crime preventers; we train those that use them," he said.

His narrative ran into the cloud of anger of residents. In Masajja, the police are now loathed for alleged brutal tackling of opposition activists.

Mr Fred Kasirye, a resident, says police need to be tamed because if it had not been for their violent actions, their talented footballer would still have both arms.

"It is high time police became careful with the arms they use or better still, be taken away from them. Most of them do not know how to use them; they just throw them all over," he said.