Umrah fares slashed

By Farooq Kasule

Any Muslim intending to perform Umrah, a lesser pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, now requires only sh4.8m to fulfil their dreams.

Most of the Haj and Umrah travel companies have slashed the fares to give a chance to the less fortunate Muslims to visit Mecca and Madinah, the two holiest cities in the Islamic faith. This follows protests by Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC), accusing Haj and Umrah Travel companies of inflating travel fees.

UMSC not only wants to take control of the sector, but also wants the number of companies slashed just like the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) has done.

Unlike the Haj, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, Umrah is a voluntary pilgrimage to Mecca, which can be performed at any time of the year.

Core for both journeys is that performing a single prayer in Masjid an-Nabawi in Madinah offers immense spiritual rewards, with one prayer equalling 1,000 done elsewhere. On the other hand, praying in Masjid al-Haram in Mecca offers immense spiritual merit with a single prayer equivalent to 100,000 elsewhere.

MAXIMISATION OF REWARDS

This underscores the importance of Muslims yearning to visit Mecca and Madinah in order to maximise the rewards, in addition to exploring the historic places mentioned in the Quran.

Congregational prayer in any ordinary mosque, results in rewards typically 25 to 27 times greater than praying alone.

Among the travel companies that have slashed the fares for Umrah are Maqam Tours and Travel and Jangu Tours and Travel.

Sheikh Shafik Mafo, the director of Maqam Tours and Travel, said they reduced the fares because performing Umrah is steadily becoming unattainable for the poor, just like it is with performing the Haj.