

Striking Mak students to undergo drugs test

Threat. The university vice chancellor says several people have reported that some of the students are on drugs, posing a security threat.

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KAMPALA. Makerere University students, who engage in violent acts during demonstrations, will upon arrest by police be subjected to drug test, the institution's Vice Chancellor has said.

Prof Barnabas Nawangwe said aggressive conduct by some students, including toppling kiosks, looting groceries from uninsured shops, assaulting passersby or non-conformist colleagues and staging roadblocks where they extort money from motorists, cannot be explained away just as "bad manners".

"During our security meetings, several people have reported that [some of] our students are on drugs; that drug abuse is a very big threat to security," he said by telephone.

He added: "Majority of the students are rising up against drug abuse and hooliganism...We have instructed police to subject any student involved in violence during strikes to a drug test."

This means a student arrested for one offence could be tried for another offence simultaneously.

The Vice Chancellor made the comments on Sunday night



Case. Police officers arrest Makerere University students during a recent strike.

PHOTO BY ALEX
ESAGALA

in a follow-up interview on his revelation a couple of days earlier about narcotics use on the main campus.

Speaking last Friday at a function organised by the Samia Bugwe community to celebrate his rise to the administrative head of Makerere University, Prof Nawangwe said: "Getting this job was one thing, but the big task is to transform the

university. Students are riotous due to consuming drugs, an issue that has to be addressed."

In explaining the manifestation and magnitude of the problem, the Vice Chancellor told this newspaper that shabbily-dressed drug dealers disguise as lunatics or homeless people scavenging for food at dumpsite on campus, where they drop the drugs for pick up by their

student-clients.

"We tasked our security officers to apprehend such people," he said. Before the planned crackdown, the suspects vanished and, Prof Nawangwe said, he suspects some informers tipped them off.

Last Saturday, top university officials had a crunch meeting with Guild Representative Council members- the elected student leaders- to find ways to stem a vice increasingly marooning young Ugandans at Butabika, the country's national referral psychiatric

hospital. The facility's financial year-based data sets for 2013, 2014 and 2015 (ending June 2016) showed the number of patients had increased every successive year since 2010, many of the victims being male drug addicts and alcoholics.

Students at Mary Stuart, a female hall of residence, told university officials that they last weekend spotted a group of brawny men taking drugs on the football pitch behind the high-rise hall.

During a sector performance review meeting last week, educationists said the drug problem was devastating school administrators.

Mr Alex Kakooza, the Education ministry permanent secretary, told this newspaper in an interview yesterday that "the problem of drug abuse exists in schools and institutions of higher learning".

Officials including President Museveni have turned to religious founders of the schools to reverse the trend of self-destruction by students, and relieve stricken parents.

Student leaders have welcomed the planned crackdown on drug users on campus.

Guild president Paul Kato said whereas no broad brush should be used to paint all university students as drug addicts, "we have a few rotten tomatoes we should get rid of".

DRUG SITUATION

Access to narcotics has lately increased and, according to police, mainly for children from wealthy families. The Force has clustered Kansanga and Bugolobi, both Kampala suburbs, and some trading centres on Entebbe Road including Nkumba, where there is a university, as hubs for dealers in cocaine, cannabis and heroin. Entebbe airport has been labelled by law enforcement officials as a must-watch conduit for drug traffickers. Criminal Investigations department said in August that they had from last year seized 1,990 kilogrammes of narcotics being smuggled through the airport and other border points.