

358 OUT OF 578 APPLICANTS HAVE QUALIFIED AND ARE READY TO TRAVEL AFTER THE IDD SEASON

By Taddeo Bwambale

The Government has distanced itself from a plan to send at least 1,000 medical workers to Libya, with the help of a prominent Kampala-based labour recruitment firm.

Reports about the deal first surfaced in international media, indicating that the Government was behind the plan, which has been heavily criticised by health activists.

In an interview with Gordon Mwesigye, the proprietor of Middle East Consultants last week, he confirmed that the first batch of successful applicants was due to travel to Libya early next month.

"So far, 358 out of 578 applicants have qualified and are ready to travel. We are waiting for the Idd season to end before they can be flagged off," he disclosed.

According to Mwesigye, Libya asked for 1,003 medical personnel, particularly the enrolled nurses. The applicants were subjected to both oral and written interviews last month, he revealed.

Govt disowns plan to export medical workers to Libya

They will be deployed to health facilities in Benghazi, Libya's second biggest city, which still faces security threats, since the 2011 unrest that led to the overthrow of the former leader, Muammar Gaddafi.

Each of the recruits will earn the equivalent of sh3m as starting salary, in addition to other benefits, under a two-year renewable contract.

Mwesigye said the company was working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to first ascertain the security situation in Libya.

However, the foreign affairs ministry spokesperson, Margaret Kafeero disassociated the ministry from the plan, maintaining that the deal was

ON THE GROUND



■ Dr Diana Atwine, the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Health, said they had not seen any document or received anyone to discuss sending health workers to Libya. She said if such a decision was made, without involving the health ministry, it would reflect a gap in the Government's communication channels.

a private arrangement, with no hand of the State.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not handle

the export of labour. The Department of Diaspora, under whose docket it would fall, has no idea about sending medical

workers to Libya," she stated.

At the height of the insurgency in Libya, Uganda evacuated its nationals and closed its embassy in the capital, Tripoli. Kafeero said the ministry learnt about the plan through the media.

Dr Diana Atwine, the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Health, said the ministry was not aware of any plan to send such a number of health workers to Libya.

"That is speculation. We have not seen any document or received anyone at our offices to discuss the possibility of sending health workers to Libya," she told *New Vision*.

She noted that any such decision, made without involving the health ministry,

would reflect a gap in government communication channels.

It is, however, not the first time reports have surfaced about the Government planning to send health workers for paid work abroad.

In 2015, the Government endorsed a plan to send at least 241 health workers, including physicians, nurses and midwives to Trinidad and Tobago, but the move faced a lot of criticism from activists and donors.

Critics complained that the export of health workers would worsen the shortage of skilled personnel in public health facilities and severely affect the delivery of health services.

In 2006, the Global Health Workforce Alliance identified Uganda as one of 57 countries facing a crisis in human resources for health.

In recent years, Uganda has been trying to recruit more health workers, yet according to a 2013 government report, 42% of Uganda's health positions are still vacant.