U.S. Embassy in Kampala suspends visa operations over Ebola outbreak

By John Musenze

The US Embassy in Kampala has temporarily suspended visa services in Uganda following over the Ebola outbreak in Uganda and the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.

In a notice issued yesterday, the embassy announced that all immigrant and non-immigrant visa operations had been paused effective immediately until further notice.

"Effective May 18, 2026, the US Embassy in Kampala, Uganda, has temporarily paused all visa services. This pause includes applications for immigrant visas as well as nonimmigrant visas for tourists, business travellers, students, exchange visitors and all other non-immigrant categories," the embassy said in a statement.

AFFECTED APPLICANTS NOTIFIED

The embassy said affected applicants had already been notified and promised to provide updates once appointment scheduling resumes.

"At this time, no visa appointments can be scheduled at US Embassy Kampala, Uganda," the notice further read.

US authorities linked the decision directly to the Ebola outbreak, saying the temporary suspension was aimed at protecting public safety.

AFP PHOTO



A medical personnel uses a contactless thermometer to check a visitor's temperature at a hospital in Goma, DRC following the Ebola outbreak in the country

The suspension comes amid heightened Ebola surveillance and emergency measures in Uganda after health authorities confirmed imported Ebola Bundibugyo virus cases from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

PREVENTING TRANSMISSION

As of May 18, at least six Americans have been exposed to the Ebola virus during a deadly outbreak in DRC. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the outbreak an international emergency, with the DRC health ministry reporting around 350 suspected cases and 91 deaths.

Uganda has since intensified contact tracing, border screening, isolation measures and community mobilisation as officials attempt to prevent local transmission of the virus.

The World Health Organisation has already declared the Ebola outbreak in Uganda and DRC a public health emergency of international concern, warning of a high regional transmission risk because of intense cross-border movement.

WHAT NEXT FOR APPLICANTS?

The embassy clarified that the move does not affect visas that have already been issued and remain valid.

The embassy also noted that applicants whose appointments were cancelled because of the suspension would not receive refunds, but would instead be rescheduled once operations resume.

"This does not affect any currently valid visas. Appointment scheduling will resume after the pause is lifted. At that time, appointments affected by the pause will be rescheduled and the applicants will be notified," the notice explained.

It added that non-immigrant visa application fees would remain valid for 365 days from the date of payment, allowing applicants to reschedule interviews within that period once services restart.

CHURCH WELCOMES DECISION

The Church of Uganda has also backed the government's decision, saying public safety and preservation of life must take priority despite the significance of Martyrs' Day.

"While this annual gathering remains one of the most significant events on the Christian calendar, the Church recognises the importance of prioritising public safety," said Rev. Canon William Ongeng, the Provincial Secretary of the Church of Uganda.

Martyrs' Day, commemorated annually on June 3 at Namugongo, is one of Uganda's largest religious gatherings.

The cerebrations attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from across Africa and beyond.

WHO commends Museveni

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (WHO) regional office for Africa has commended President Yoweri Museveni for postponing the annual Martyrs Day celebrations, describing the decision as an important public health measure. In a statement, WHO regional director for Africa Prof. Mohamed Janabi praised Uganda's leadership and commitment to preventing a wider outbreak.

"Your Excellency President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, I wish to express our sincere appreciation for your leadership and decision regarding the faith gathering planned for June 3. In the context of the Ebola outbreak, this action helps prevent the risk of large-scale transmission among millions," Prof. Janabi said.

The WHO Africa office said the postponement demonstrated Uganda's commitment to safeguarding communities and limiting the spread of the highly infectious Ebola Bundibugyo virus strain.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also praised Uganda's response efforts, saying the Government had taken swift measures to contain the outbreak.

"We thank the Government of Uganda for their swift action and all precautionary measures to prevent Ebola from spreading further, including the postponement of the Martyrs Day commemoration. We will continue to work closely together to protect the affected communities and to end the outbreak," Tedros posted on his official X account.

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