

UPDF starts building state-of-the-art hospital

By Pascal Kwesiga

When the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) National Referral Hospital is up and running, the medical expenditure of the military will be reduced by a half, according to the defence and veteran affairs ministry.

The UPDF on Saturday launched the construction of the over sh150b (including construction and equipment) national referral hospital at the lower Mbuya military barracks in Kampala.

The old health facility within the barracks has been pulled down to pave the way for the building of what the army is describing "state-of-the-art" national referral hospital. The facility, according to the military, will be open to civilians.

The UPDF has been spending roughly sh5b on the treatment of soldiers abroad annually.

The acting permanent secretary (PS) in the defence ministry, Edith Buturo, said at the breaking of the ground ceremony in Mbuya, that there will be no more referrals abroad once the hospital comes on stream in the next 36 months.

However, the PS said the 250-bed hospital could also be delivered within 18 months, and urged the contractor, China National Aero-technology International Engineering Corporation (CATIC), to speed up the project's execution.

"There will be no need of flying sick and tired soldiers abroad for treatment. We shall have all specialised services done here. Now that we have the money, we should get the



Chief of Defence Forces Gen. David Muhoozi (right), Dr Ben Mbonye (second-right), Minister of Health Dr Jane Ruth Aceng (third-right), defence minister Adolf Mwesige (fourth-right) and other officials during the breaking of the ground ceremony for the UPDF National Referral Hospital in Mbuya, Kampala on Saturday. Photo by Godfrey Kimono

work started, at least the first phase should be embarked on and completed," Buturo stated.

The UPDF runs health facilities at battalion, brigade, divisional and zonal level. It also runs the general military hospital, which is at the level of a district hospital at Bombo in Luwero district.

Currently, the UPDF refers cases that cannot be handled at its facilities to private and public hospitals such as Nakasero and Mulago National

The building of the hospital will cost sh130b

Referral Hospital.

Internationally, the force refers cases to Artemis Hospital in India, according to the Chief of Defence Forces, Gen. David Muhoozi.

The chairman of the hospital project steering committee, Dr. Ben Mbonye, the army's chief of medical services, said the multi-disciplinary health facility will offer a broad range of medical services.

The six-block facility will among others be comprised, according to Mbonye, of two VIP suites, theatres, imaging and lab sections, outpatient and inpatient facilities.

"We asked the ministry (defence) to give us personnel

from the UPDF engineering brigade and we hand them over to the contractor so they can gain experience during the execution of the project. It is one of the major hospital projects in the country," he added.

The defence and veteran affairs minister, Adolf Mwesige, said the facility will also serve as a teaching hospital for medical students from universities.

"We want value for money.

We want durable buildings that will serve the purpose," the minister added.

The health minister, Dr. Jane Aceng, said: "We are excited that UPDF can finally have a national referral hospital to give specialist services to the members of the military. UPDF is part of our national task force,"

Muhoozi said the hospital will reinforce the country's health services delivery infrastructure.