...uuga, ordered that the deadline for motor ... One thorny issue smacking conflict of interest ... Wednesday gave the contract a clean bill of health, saying it offends no law in Uganda.

Laboratory services Bill thrown out of Parliament

By Vision Reporter

The Uganda Police Force (UPF) and Uganda Prisons Service (UPS) have said the Uganda National Health Laboratory Services Bill does not adequately cater for their laboratories.

In her presentation to the Parliament's health committee yesterday, the officer in charge of laboratory services for UPS, Sarah Namutebi, said whereas they have 13 laboratories, which offer diagnostic services to inmates, staff and outside communities, they do not get adequate support from the health ministry and the Bill is silent on the matter.

"The mandate to provide technical support to the ministry was not spelt out during the transfer of our health facilities from the health ministry to the internal affairs ministry and this Bill is not also addressing that problem," Namutebi argued.

Currently, there is no law providing for a central co-ordination and management mechanism with a mandate to manage and organise laboratory services in Uganda, which increases the risks of operating illegal and unsafe laboratory services in the country. The Bill seeks to address that gap.

The UPF, which is mandated to carry out forensic laboratory services to aid in investigating crime cases, presented objections to the Bill, especially the provisions which put them under the supervision of the Uganda National Health Laboratory Services.

The Police director for legal services, Erasmus Twaruhukwa, said: "Under Section 5(b), the Bill seeks to address forensic service delivery, to which the Uganda Police Force is a primary stakeholder. Incorporating our roles in this Bill would necessitate changing the title of the Bill and putting a separate section in it to cater for forensic services."



Members of the Police Force: Twaruhukwa, Moses Byaruhanga and Ezati Samuel appearing before the health committee of Parliament yesterday. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

Citing the 2012 East African Council of Ministers, which resolved that the Uganda Police Forensic Services Directorate hosts the regional forensic referral centre as a centre of excellence, Twaruhukwa argued that the best option would to be to have a separate Bill to create a separate body to regulate forensic laboratory services under UPF.

Parliament, through its health committee, chaired by Dr Michael Bukenya, is currently conducting public hearings from various stakeholders on the Bill, which, among other objectives, seeks to safeguard the lives of Ugandans by ensuring quality services and products are produced by the laboratories in the country.

On Wednesday, lab experts from Makerere University, agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries ministry, as well as those from the National Drug Authority also expressed disappointment that views that would cater for their interests had not been incorporated in the Bill by the health ministry, which authored it.

Considering the fact that nearly all stakeholders that have appeared before the committee faulted the Ministry of Health for not seeking their input in the Bill, the Katikamu South MP, Edward Ssembatya, said there is need for the authors of the Bill to go back to the drawing board, to have the input from all stakeholders.

"This Bill has a direct bearing on the safety of the lives of Ugandans. Without an efficient mechanism for regulating what happens in laboratories, people's lives get endangered. In fact, the best solution is for the Bill to be withdrawn, so that it is repackaged with the input of all stakeholders," Ssembatya argued.

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