

Salaries

Agreement

Allowances

Vehicles

Doctors happy with govt promises

Mary Karugaba
and Vivian Agaba

Uganda Medical Association (UMA) president Dr Ekwaro Obuku has said the national executive committee (NEC) of the association is satisfied with the promises the Government has committed to do in writing.

Doctors countrywide have been on strike for more than two weeks over poor pay and inadequate medical supplies in health facilities, among other issues.

Obuku, however, said the issues will have to first be discussed by the general assembly of UMA this Saturday before any position is taken to call off the strike.

"As NEC, we are okay with the commitments from government but the final decision on whether the strike should go on will be taken during the general assembly," he said.

A special Cabinet committee was instituted last week to engage UMA in talks aimed at ending their strike.

Committee members

Members of the committee are health minister Jane Ruth Aceng, public service state minister David Karubanga, Attorney General William Byaruhanga, Deputy Attorney General Mwesigwa Rukutana, planning state minister David Bahati and his higher education state minister John Chrysostom Muyingo.

Briefing journalists yesterday at Mulago Hospital guest house, Obuku said the issues the parties had agreed on include increasing the doctors' salary to sh5m per month for the starting doctors.

The Government also allegedly okayed a supplementary budget to address the chronic stock-outs of medical supplies, vaccines and medicines in hospitals.

The parties also agreed to halt the 'war' on doctors by restructuring or



Dr Obuku (centre) and other doctors addressing the media at Mulago Hospital yesterday. He said the doctors would meet on Saturday to decide on their next action. Photo by Nancy Nanyonga

disbanding the State House Health Monitoring Unit. The Government also agreed to improve the doctors' working conditions by setting a side sh200b for their duty facilitation allowance.

Other issues agreed upon include reviewing doctors' benefits, including providing them with official vehicles, housing, domestic workers and regularising intern doctors and senior health officers in the public service structure complete with meals at their workplace, accommodation and salary.

"Today, as leaders of doctors, we have considered trusting the Government. We hope it will value this trust. Together we could build a stronger bond of constructive

BETWEEN THE LINES: What the doctors were promised

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working conditions by setting a side sh200b for their facilitation allowance.

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engagement for a robust health system responsive to the common Ugandans," Dr Obuku said. However,

the permanent secretary in the finance ministry, Keith Muhakanizi, said he was not aware of the issues

agreed upon since he is not a member of the negotiating committee.

Asked to comment about the commitment letter and reports of salary increment, Muhakanizi said: "We are still negotiating. Even a commitment letter is part of the negotiations. But what I know the ministry is still working on the numbers."

Bahati confirmed that government had made a written commitment to the association but declined to discuss the details. "Why don't you ask them if the salary increment is part of the commitment we made? I can send you the letter," he said.

Obuku called on government officials to respect the guidance of the International Labour Organisation on collective bargaining.

Harassment claims

He, however, expressed concern over harassment of some of medical workers in health facilities in Gulu, Hoima and Soroti by resident district commissioners and hospital directors.

"I would like to caution these individuals that this negative action would threaten to reverse the tremendous progress made thus far," he said.

Assurance given

According to Obuku, the association had received assurance from members of the Cabinet select committee that it is not the policy of government to terminate the work of government employees who exercise their right to collective bargaining via industrial action, and that state functionaries harassing and threatening doctors are doing it on their own.

He said the Cabinet committee members also asked doctors who are being harassed to take the details of such individuals, including names, telephone numbers, and districts for further disciplinary action.

By Faridah Kulabako

Public to monitor NMC drug supplies

to cost sh69.9b and will be completed by June 2019.