

Govt blocks 500 porn websites in nationwide crackdown

BY KARIM MUYOBO

KAMPALA. The government has blocked at least 500 websites hosting pornographic content in a renewed nationwide crackdown aimed at protecting children and safeguarding public morality.

By midday yesterday, authorities said the websites had been disabled following a directive issued in coordination with the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity and the Pornography Control Committee.

Addressing journalists at the Uganda Media Centre in Kampala, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) spokesperson Ibrahim Bbosa said telecommunication operators had complied with a notice issued on April 2 to restrict access to websites distributing explicit material.

"Following our notice to telecommunication operators on April 2, they have confirmed the blocking of 500 websites that were distributing pornographic content," Mr Bbosa said.

He noted that while licensed broad-

casters such as television and radio stations have largely complied with content regulations due to strict licensing conditions and penalties, unregulated online platforms and social media remain the biggest challenge.

"The public is reminded of the need to safeguard the integrity and moral values of our children and our country. Children are the future leaders, and early exposure to pornography can lead to addiction and distorted values. We must work together to make our media a space safe for everyone, especially the young," he added.

Authorities said the easy accessibility of explicit content online has raised concern over children's exposure to harmful material at an early age, with fears of addiction and long-term behavioural effects.

Mr Bbosa said regulating social media platforms remains difficult because of the role algorithms play in amplifying content.

"We are not in your WhatsApp groups. You need to understand that social media is driven by algorithms. Every

SPIRITED FIGHT

The latest action revives efforts first publicly highlighted in 2016 when the then State Minister for Ethics and Integrity, the late Fr Simon Lokodo, proposed the procurement of a Shs300 million machine to detect and control pornographic content on mobile phones and other electronic devices.

time a piece of content is shared, liked, retweeted, or viewed, the algorithm interprets it as popular and gives it more prominence," he said.

"By engaging with such content, we are inadvertently promoting immoral material, yet we expect regulators to prevent us from seeing it."

He added that although authorities can issue takedown notices to platform owners, including those based outside Uganda, enforcement remains complicated due to differing legal and moral

standards across jurisdictions.

What became of the pornography machine?

Dr Annette Kezaabu, the chairperson of the Pornography Control Committee, said the government did not proceed with the purchase because the UCC already has the mandate and technical capacity to monitor and block such content.

"The machine that the late [Ethics minister] Fr Simon Lokodo talked about was considered. However, UCC already has the capability, thus no need to duplicate resources use existing legal and institutional frameworks to combat the vice," Dr Kezaabu explained.

She said the committee is now working closely with the UCC to strengthen detection and enforcement mechanisms, including tracing the origin of harmful content.

"Our past weakness has been enforcement. There was a pause in our operations, but that has now been lifted, and we are resuming full activities," she said.

Dr Kezaabu also revealed that author-

ities are investigating emerging hubs of pornography, including private residences and nightlife venues.

"There are many hubs of pornography operating at night, even in places you wouldn't expect, including people's homes. We have received reports, and inspections are ongoing," she said.

She added that surveillance operations had already led to the summoning of the proprietor of New Best Hotel, who reportedly promised to halt such activities.

Meanwhile, Mr Joel Wanjala, the Undersecretary in the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity, said the government is developing a national policy on religious and faith-based organisations to strengthen collaboration in rebuilding societal values.

He also expressed concern over the growing trend of revenge pornography, where intimate images are shared maliciously after relationships break down.

"Many cases we encounter involve individuals sharing intimate images out of revenge after relationships end. These cases are handled individually, most are reported to the police, and we follow up while ensuring the victims are protected until the court determines otherwise," Mr Wanjala said.