



Conservation. Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga plants a tree at the National Water and Sewerage Corporation International Resource Centre during the launch of the one million tree planting campaign on Wednesday. Ms Kadaga said the National Tree Fund meant to finance tree planting and growing, which has stalled for more than a decade, will be operationalised next financial year. She said she "will not let Ministry of Finance to get away with it" when allocating funds to priority sectors in the next budget. PHOTO BY STEPHEN OTAGE

Govt clears 30 firms to export workers

Merged. Gender, Labour and Social Development minister Janet Mukwaya yesterday said the other companies not licensed will have to operate under the 30 cleared.

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KAMPALA. Government has cleared only 30 of 75 companies that had applied to export labour to Saudi Arabia.

Gender, Labour and Social Development minister Janet Mukwaya yesterday said the other companies not licensed will have to operate under the 30 cleared.

"We have licensed 30 companies for labour exportation to Saudi Arabia because of the introduction of the online visa processing system," Ms Mukwaya said during a meeting with Saudi Arabian ambassador Abdullah Bin Khalid Al-Qahtani and other Saudi delegates in Kampala.

Mr Al-Qahtani, who said his government had met all the labour pre-export conditions, said: "All the requirements have been met and this is the last one. With the online visa processing system, Ugandans who want to work in Saudi Arabia would take only one day to process their visas."

In January 2016, the government banned the recruitment and deployment of domestic workers to Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries, citing inhumane treatment by employers abroad.

The ban came after a review of the processes and procedures relating to the recruitment and deployment of housemaids as well as their working conditions in Saudi Arabia.

Early this year, the external labour recruitment agencies asked government to lift the ban on exportation of domestic workers to enable Ugandans tap into foreign jobs.

The agencies, through their umbrella body, the Uganda Association for External Recruitment Agencies, argued that the ban had caused more problems, including unemployment.

Mr. Al-Qahtani said

ONLINE VISA

How the system works It is a system deployed by the Saudi Arabia to monitor Uganda labour recruiting companies. It monitors how many workers have been recruited and where they have been deployed by the agencies in Saudi Arabia. It helps in capturing the data into their systems.

Requirements for labour agencies An average of five to 10 computers with steady internet provided, an accessible office location with modern facilities, competent staff and stable security around the offices.

mistreatment and inhuman practices was a result of individuals and unlicensed companies using middlemen to smuggle workers from Uganda without the consent of the two governments.

"Middle-men and illegal exporters of workers were some of the problems we had. This was hard to follow up. We have therefore registered and assessed which companies will be exporting labour. Those caught [bypassing the system] shall face serious consequences," he said.

The chairman Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies, Mr Andrew Tumwine Kameraho, said: "There are about 20,000 Ugandan workers in Saudi Arabia alone and a total of 100,000 in the Middle East. The workers are employed as tailors, nannies, drivers, mechanics, and gardeners, among others."

Ms Mukwaya said the 30 companies will be required to pay a fee of Shs50M to the ministry to facilitate government to follow up the workers in those countries.

"We are not targeting only maids in this case; we have educated Ugandans who are also going and we are working with Saudi Arabia to see that our people do not only do domestic work but also other jobs," she said.

Ms Mukwaya also said government has licensed 10 companies to provide pre-departure and arrival lectures that will help the workers to assimilate in their new environments.