

WHO IS GIRMA, UGANDA AIRLINES ACTING CEO?

By Charles Etukuri

President Yoweri Museveni on Friday directed the Minister of Works and Transport, Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala, to immediately appoint the former Ethiopian Airlines CEO, Girma Wake, as a consultant and acting CEO of Uganda Airlines. The move is aimed at addressing what Museveni described as persistent management weaknesses within the national carrier.

In a letter to Gen. Katumba, Museveni further directed that the current CEO, Jennifer Bamuturaki, immediately step aside and hand over office to Wake and the board.

"I also direct that the current CEO, Bamuturaki, be enabled to step aside immediately and hand over to Wake and the board of Uganda Airlines. The board should go ahead and organise whatever emoluments are due to her," Museveni said in the letter.

Wake, 82, is expected to work closely with the board until a substantive CEO is

competitively appointed in July.

Wake's appointment follows his February 4 meeting with Museveni. In a post on social media platform X, the President said then they had discussed matters regarding air transport.

BAMUTURAKI'S EXIT

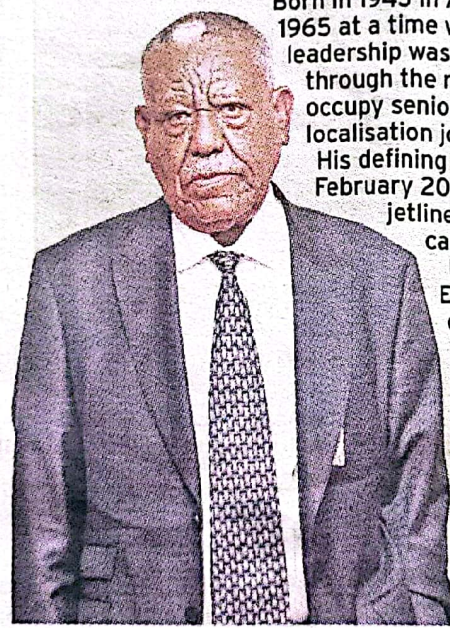
On February 3, transport state minister Fred Byamukama said Bamuturaki had effectively been relieved of her duties in July last year, following a presidential directive issued after a board audit.

Byamukama said a May 2025 probe by the Uganda Airlines board uncovered alleged corruption, losses and mismanagement within the airline. The board handed over the report to the President.

"In his response, the President directed that Bamuturaki be given one year, which is ending this June. We have started the process and hope that by May this year, we shall have got a new CEO," Byamukama said.

GIRMA WAKE BACKGROUND

Wake is widely credited with transforming Ethiopian Airlines from a modest regional carrier into Africa's aviation powerhouse.



Born in 1943 in Addis Ababa, he joined Ethiopian Airlines in 1965 at a time when the airline's technical and managerial leadership was still heavily influenced by expatriates. He rose through the ranks to become one of the first Ethiopians to occupy senior executive roles, a milestone in the airline's localisation journey.

His defining tenure came when he returned as CEO in February 2004. At the time, the airline operated 12 jetliners, served 42 international destinations and carried about 1.2 million passengers annually.

Under his reform blueprint, Vision 2010, Ethiopian Airlines recorded average annual growth of about 25% between 2005 and 2010. Passenger numbers nearly tripled to 3.2 million, while the fleet expanded from 12 to 37 aircraft.

By the time he stepped down in 2011, Ethiopian Airlines had become Africa's benchmark carrier.

Wake later served as chairman of RwandAir from 2012 to 2017 and returned to the Ethiopian Airlines board in 2018, becoming its chairperson in 2022 until June 2023.

He said several managers that were implicated in the alleged mismanagement would not be spared and could

face prosecution. Bamuturaki had earlier circulated an internal memo informing staff that the

board would soon advertise the position of CEO and encouraged qualified staff to apply.

Appointed in July 2022 after the suspension and eventual dismissal of her predecessor, Cornel Muleya, Bamuturaki's three-year tenure was marked by repeated turbulence. She faced scrutiny from Parliament's committee on commissions, statutory authorities and state enterprises in 2024, a board-led investigation in May last year and a December probe by the Criminal Investigations Directorate targeting top officials over alleged abuse of office.

Byamukama cited internal managerial conflicts, expansion of routes beyond fleet capacity and operational losses as some of the concerns that informed the President's decision.

"They opened so many routes which were uncalled for compared to the fleet we have. There were managerial fights from top management downwards. The airline started making losses and could not grow," Byamukama said.