

By Francis Kagolo

Government agrees to pay doctors allowances

The Government has agreed to start paying doctors in public health facilities duty facilitation allowances.

This is part of the Government's commitment to the doctors to call off their strike, which has paralysed health services across the country for two weeks.

Other offers include payment of senior house officers (doctors studying master's degrees), who have not been earning salary for their work in hospitals during the time of study.

According to the letter communicating the Government's commitment, there are 559 senior house officers, who will share the initial sh4.2b that is to be paid on a monthly basis immediately after verification.

However, the Ministry of Health was mandated to develop a policy defining the senior officers and develop their position in the hospital structure within 30 days.

The Government also agreed to reinstate the bachelor's degree medical interns to

sh940,000 monthly allowances each. The health ministry had slashed the interns' monthly allowances to sh740,000 per person recently because of the high numbers.

The offer was agreed on during a meeting held on November 20, between the Uganda Medical Association (UMA) and the Cabinet committee set up to negotiate on behalf of the Government.

"It was agreed that duty facilitation allowance should be part of doctors' remuneration being considered by the salary review committee," the letter reads. The letter was signed by the state minister of finance for planning, David Bahati, a member of the Cabinet negotiating committee.

Other members of the Cabinet committee are health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng; state minister for public service David Karubanga; Attorney General William Byaruhanga; Deputy Attorney General Mwesigwa Rukutana and the state minister

On Wednesday, UMA president Dr Obuku said the National Executive Committee (NEC) was satisfied with the promises the Government had committed to do in writing.

Obuku, however, said the issues will have to first be discussed by the general assembly tomorrow before any position on the strike is taken.

"As NEC, we are okay with the commitments from the Government, but the final decision on whether the strike should go on or not will be taken during the general assembly," he said.

UMA EXECUTIVE HAPPY

for higher education, Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo.

Announcing the strike on November 6, UMA decried the Government's reluctance to respond to their demands for allowances since they lodged the demand in Parliament in July last year.

Over 1,000 doctors on government payroll had initially demanded sh168b to cater for their allowances, but they later reduced it to sh55b.

"It was agreed that the Minister of Public Service meets UMA to receive their input into the salary review process," Bahati said in his letter to UMA president Dr Ekwaro Obuku. "The salary review committee should ensure that the figures proposed by the President while meeting doctors at State House and communicated in writing to UMA be considered during the review and feedback be given to UMA after the



David Bahati

review by December 15."

The letter of November 21 was copied to Prime Minister Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, other committee members and the President's principal private secretary.

Monitoring unit for review

According to Bahati's letter, the Government agreed to urgently look into the managerial aspects of the entire supply chain (of medicines and medical supplies) up to the beneficiary to address bottlenecks affecting access to these supplies.

The National Medical Stores is

charged with procuring, storage and distribution of essential medicines and medical supplies to all public health facilities in the country.

The agency has always been accused of delayed drug deliveries, resulting in shortages in some public health facilities.

In order to address drug inadequacies, the Government okayed a supplementary budget of sh41b in the current financial year 2017/2018, according to Bahati's letter. This is in addition to the sh238b that had been budgeted for.

UMA had also asked for the disbandment of the State House Medicines and Health Services Delivery Monitoring Unit, complaining that it targets and unfairly treats doctors.

However, the Government has asked UMA to submit a report of all complaints against the unit to the security minister within 10 days. The minister will then submit a report to Rugunda for consideration by the Government.