

# I did not steal money for Jinja institute, says Kamuntu

BY JACKIE NAMBOGGA

THE Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Ephraim Kamuntu, has denied stealing \$5m (sh18b) for the construction of a hotel and tourism institute in Jinja.

The money was part of the \$12m borrowed from the World Bank for building a five-star hotel at the Uganda Hotel and Tourism Training Institute (HTTI) in Jinja town.

However, Kamuntu, who was the chief guest at the inauguration of the board of governors at the HTTI in Jinja recently, denied stealing the money saying it reduced due to exchange rates.

Kamuntu regretted that since the funds were secured in 2012, there was no work seen on the ground.

"As a result of foreign exchange adjustment, we have lost nearly \$7m and if you are in my shoes when this reduction came, they said money had been stolen," he said.

Kamuntu said lack of readiness affected the project.

Alex Ruhunda, the chairperson of the parliamentary committee of tourism, attributed the stalling of the project on securing loans when they were ill-prepared.

"This is not a problem for this particular project, but we have had a wide range of useless loans, including where President Yoweri Museveni had to denounce certain loans that had been okayed by the Cabinet," Ruhunda said.

Ruhunda, who is also the Fort Portal municipality legislator, cited the procurement process of selecting the contractor, saying it was wrong.

He also said the project's plans were not ready by that time and that there were no bill of quantities to base on to avail the funds.



Kamuntu shaking hands with Grace Aulo, the ministry of tourism representative on the board, as former minister Daudi Migereko looks on. Kamuntu says \$7m was lost in exchange adjustments

He said initially, it was a \$100m loan, but the Uganda Registration Services Bureau used part of it while the lands ministry, through the computerisation of the titles, took another chunk of money.

As a result, Ruhunda said the initial plan of rebuilding and expanding the facility has changed from a 5-star hotel to a 3-star.

The current one-storey facility that was built in 1956 has 37 rooms, but under the new development, it will have 60 rooms, modern kitchen and classroom block, among others.

"The finance ministry must ensure that it avails the remaining funds to put up a modern structure," he said.

Ruhunda noted that the HTTI could not lobby for resources because it had, for the last seven years, been operating without a governing body.

Kamuntu thanked the 10-member board led by Patricia Ssempe for accepting to serve at a challenging time which he said requires a lot of stamina to provide a strategic direction and make the institute a centre of excellence.