

Gulf crisis disrupts flights at Entebbe

BY PAUL ADUDE

KAMPALA. Several airlines operating flights between Entebbe International Airport and the Middle East have suspended or delayed operations following escalating hostilities involving the United States, Israel and Iran, which triggered widespread airspace closures across the Gulf region at the weekend.

The disruption followed a reported joint United States-Israel attack on Iran on Saturday and retaliatory strikes by Iran targeting US military bases in Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

In response, Dubai authorities closed the country's airspace, prompting Dubai Airports to suspend all operations at Dubai International Airport and Dubai World Central - Al Maktoum International Airport until further notice.

Uganda Airlines announced the temporary suspension of its scheduled flights between Entebbe International Airport (EBB) and Dubai International Airport (DXB).

"Uganda Airlines wishes to inform its esteemed guests and the general public of the temporary suspension of its scheduled flights between Entebbe International Airport and Dubai International Airport," the airline said in a statement.

The national carrier added that passengers with confirmed bookings would be re-accommodated on alternative airlines where possible or re-booked on future Uganda Airlines flights at no extra cost once operations resume. The airline pledged to provide updates once Dubai airspace reopens.

Airport sources indicated that several carriers operating the Entebbe-Middle East route were affected. A Flydubai aircraft that departed Entebbe at about 11am on Saturday reportedly turned back mid-flight after receiving information about the airspace closure and landed safely later in the afternoon.

Other airlines, including Qatar Airways and Air Arabia, suspended departures and remained grounded at Entebbe.

Uganda Civil Aviation Authority (UCAA) spokesperson Vianney Luggya confirmed the suspension of multiple Middle East-bound flights due to the evolving security situation.

"With Flydubai, they arrived at 10am with passengers and departed at 11am, but received information about the airspace closure while airborne and returned safely," Mr Luggya said. "Qatar Airways and Air Arabia did not take off and remain parked."

He added that Emirates, Flynas and another Qatar Airways flight scheduled for Sunday would not operate.

Mr Luggya urged passengers travelling to Middle Eastern destinations to remain in contact with their airlines for updates.