

Go back to work, govt tells doctors

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KAMPALA. Health minister Jane Ruth Aceng has asked striking doctors to return to work immediately as government addresses their issues.

The doctors under their umbrella body Uganda Medical Association (UMA), laid down their tools on Monday after government failed to respond to their demands, which include better working conditions and increased salaries.

"Government appeals to all medical doctors to return to work immediately as their concerns are being addressed," Dr Aceng said yesterday at the Uganda Media Centre.

Some patients have since died and several others turned away as the strike entered its third day.

This newspaper understands that an emergency meeting by the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Ruganda, with top members of UMA to end the industrial action, hit a deadlock on Tuesday.

According to Dr Ekwaro Obuku, the UMA president, their team led by his deputy, Prof Pauline Byakika, was inconclusive and the scheduled doctors' meeting with officials from Ministry of Finance on Tuesday also ended in a deadlock.

Dr Obuku indicated that they would review the mechanisms of implementing the strike, the day they meet President Museveni on November 17.

Pay policy in final stage

However, Ms Aceng said striking doctors should wait for the government to finalise the Public Service pay policy which is intended to eliminate pay disparities and ensure pay enhancement across the public sector.

"It is expected that by end of November 2017, government will pronounce itself on the matter," she said.

But Dr Obuku said the strike can only end if the government resolves issues of duty facilitation allowances, fixes intern doctors' working conditions and welfare as well as payments for senior house officers.

Dr Aceng said intern doctors are not in formal employment and therefore are paid allowances and not salary.

She said the government will maintain their allowances at the same rate as last year, without deductions.

Meanwhile, the State Minister for Public Service, Mr David Karubanga, said UMA and some other associations have hijacked the role of Public Service labour unions.

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