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Why govt won't return body of Ugandan killed in Ukraine

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

KAMPALA. The government has said it has no plans to facilitate the repatriation of the body of Edison Kamwesigye, a Ugandan national who was killed on the frontline in the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war.

The State Minister for Foreign Affairs in charge of International Relations, Mr Henry Oryem Okello, said his ministry is not responsible for repatriating the bodies of Ugandans who die abroad, saying the responsibility lies with the labour firms or agents that facilitated their travel.

"The government of Uganda does not have the capacity to repatriate the bodies of Ugandans who lose their lives abroad. That's why we tell you, you have to go to the official channels, making sure that the agent who is taking you abroad becomes responsible for your health and for your return home if you die," Mr Oryem said.

He added: "In this particular case, it is a very unfortunate situation of a person who died in Ukraine, in the war, who shouldn't have gone there in the first place, but my ministry doesn't have the means to repatriate the bodies of Ugandans even when they die abroad."

Mr Oryem's remarks followed an appeal by Kamwesigye's widow, Ms Caroline Mukiza, who called on the government and the Russian Embassy in Uganda to assist in returning her husband's remains.

According to Ms Mukiza, her husband left Uganda on January 8 after securing what he believed to be a job as a security guard in Russia.

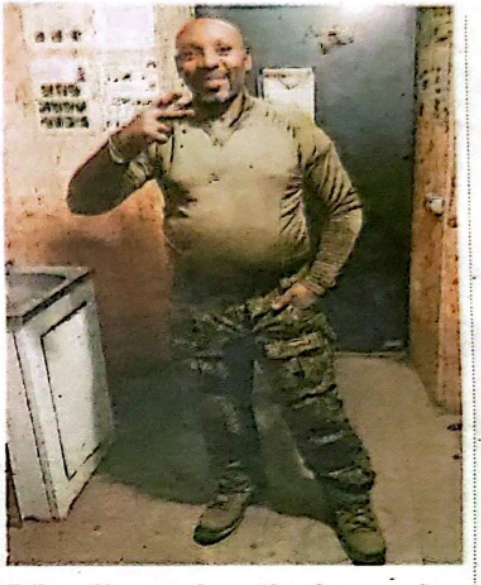
She said Kamwesigye, who was generally secretive about his plans, did not inform her of his destination and instead travelled with a colleague. He later contacted her after arriving in Russia.

"In his communication, he told me that he needed prayers, saying things are tough this way, and that is when he told me that he was in Russia and that they were forced to sign contracts of military nature, and they had no choice, and that they had been given training for one week," she added.

Ms Mukiza said her husband informed her that they had undergone one week of combat training and were to be deployed to the battlefield shortly thereafter.

"A week later, I received a message from one of my husband's friends, who used to work with me in Iraq, asking me about our children and my husband. When I replied that he is fine, he asked if he could share with me the latest photos, of which I declined," she said.

The news of Kamwesigye's death later emerged on a Ukrainian X-platform account that shares videos and photographs from the war.



Edison Kamwesigye, the deceased. PHOTO / COURTESY

"We started on the process of repatriating the body, and some people advised us to petition the Embassy of Russia in Uganda, which we did on January 27," Ms Mukiza said.

"I also called the State Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon Okello Oryem, who asked me to share what we have, and now we are waiting for what will come from there," she added.

Kamwesigye's parents, Mr Mwesigwa John Zaire and Mrs Akatukunda Apofia Mwesigwa, also petitioned the Russian Embassy in Uganda seeking assistance.

Mr Oryem confirmed receiving the family's plea but reiterated that the government could not intervene.

"I have always advised, it's on record, I have always told Ugandans travelling abroad to do jobs, any job abroad, to desist from travelling unless it's officially sanctioned by the government of Uganda," he said, adding that those who travel outside official arrangements do so at their own risk.

ABOUT THE DECEASED

Kamwesigye was born in Kibombo Village, Nyakaina Parish in Buyanja Sub-county, Rukungiri District. He was a father of two and had been renting a house for his family in Ganda Village, Nansana Municipality, Wakiso District, before leaving Uganda.

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