Museveni sets new terms for public servants' salaries

Harmonisation. The President says public service pay must be based on the principles of adequacy, equity and sustainability.

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KAMPALA. President Museveni has set new yardsticks to be used for remunerating civil servants under a proposal to comprehensively review pay for all public servants.

The President has also directed Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda to fast-track the establishment and operationalisation of a national Salary Review Commission by October 31 to determine and harmonise remunerations for government employees.

"Salary disparities across different categories of public servants must be harmonised. Forthwith, public service pay must be based on the principles of adequacy, equity and sustainability," Mr Museveni said in a speech read yesterday on his behalf by Dr Rugunda at 2018/2019 Financial Year budget conference.

The Cabinet ordered an overhaul of salaries following a clamour for pay raise by different segments of public servants, the latest being judicial officers who went on strike for nearly two weeks after the government failed to fulfill its promise to improve their welfare.

Pay disparities remain an emotive issue among government employees and a source of rivalry and conflict between agencies that have significantly varied pay scales to reward personnel of similar qualification and experience.

A May 2017 report by the Equal Opportunities Commission, a statutory entity, flagged the salary disparities as potential justification for absenteeism, low morale and corruption among bureaucrats.

"The study found out that there are wide salary disparities in the public service that are manifested in the salary differentials between the traditional civil service and statutory bodies established Acts of Parliament," the commission noted.

It was also established that whereas traditional civil servants' salaries are determined by the Ministry of Public Service, their counterparts at statutory bodies determine or negotiate their own pay, leading to mismatches.

"The Ministry of Public Service plays a big role in determining salaries for the traditional civil service... Other statutory institutions and bodies such as universities, funds, authorities, and boards determine their salaries in consultation and with approval of the Ministry of Public Service," the report said.

Those anomalies coupled with enduring complaints by disadvantaged public servants prompted the President to freeze creation of new government agencies and possible merger or closure of some.

Cabinet has given the Public Service ministry up to next month to present blueprints for its consideration.

In May 2015, this newspaper published a story on a leaked report of Parliament's Committee on Commissions, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises, which contained a list of the earnings by senior government officials.

The committee raised concern about the "glaring huge salary disparities", warning that remuneration is not guided by any policy.

The government to its credit in the past financial year revised salaries of some public servants, including the Chief Justice and his deputy as well as permanent secretaries.

Those interventions, critics say, were piece-meal and left lower-level employees more heart-broken.

According to the government's timeline, Cabinet could pronounce itself on the proposal to scrap, downsize or merge many of its 119 statutory authorities, commissions and agencies as early as December, this year.



Rights. Medical interns and students march in Mbarara Towr recently protesting poor pay. PHOTO BY FELIX AINEBYOONA