

Refugee scam: PS takes leave before suspending Kazungu

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KAMPALA. Ms Christine Guwatudde Kintu, the permanent secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), has taken annual leave and delegated the interdiction of the embattled Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Apollo Kazungu, to Mr Joel Wanjala, the Undersecretary in-charge of finance and administration.

Ms Guwatudde was a week ago, on January 30, directed by Mr Hillary Ongek, the minister for Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, to interdict Mr Kazungu and three other officials working with the Refugee Department with "immediate effect".

The other officials are Mr Walter Omondi, the Refugee Desk Officer in Mbarara; Mr John Baptist Sentamu, formerly the Camp Commandant in Mbarara, who was recently transferred to Hoima; and Mr Francis Nkwasiabwe, a Registration Officer/Assistant Commandant in Mbarara, who too had been recently transferred.

The interdictions

The interdictions are to enable the commencement of investigations into allegations of abuse of resources meant for refugees.

Asked yesterday whether he has since interdicted Mr Kazungu and the trio, Mr Wanjala said: "We are handling all the issues in accordance with government's established disciplinary processes. We have also instituted an investigation and further decisions will be based on the outcome of the investigation."

We were unable to speak to Ms Guwatudde on why she decided to take leave at this time. She did not respond to our phone calls and text messages by press time.

Sources within OPM told this reporter that interdicting a civil servant is a process, which starts with writing to the accused person to explain himself, before the permanent secretary writes back to direct that the accused person leave office to pave way for investigations.

A public official, who is on interdiction, is put on half pay, and the interdiction should

Victims. Refugees wait for medical attention at a health centre in Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement Camp, Yumbe District recently. FILE PHOTO



THE ALLEGATIONS

Fraud. The allegations the officials face include fraud regarding the distribution of food assistance, refugees being required to pay bribes in order to get registered and allegations that scholarships meant for refugees are instead going to Ugandans.

Trafficking. There are also allegations of trafficking of minor girls and women to marry men, who are not of their choice after paying a bribe to officials at the border crossing points and claims that officials interfere in the election of leaders in refugee communities to prevent individuals

before the investigations are completed and a decision is made whether to reinstate the concerned person or take more action.

Our sources say the process to interdict Mr Kazungu and the other three officials has already been triggered, with the accused persons already having written to explain themselves to their supervisors.

Our sources say since it became apparent that Mr Kazungu would be interdicted to pave way for investigations, a number of lower cadre workers in the Refugee Department and refugees have stepped forward to provide information on how the refugee scam was executed.

In general, the testimonies are that the heads of the Refugee Department carried out most of the fraud through putting together food logs and cash logs that included "ghost" refugees.

The bloated food logs would then be passed on to the United Nations

then pass them on to the World Food Programme, which would in turn pass them on to its appointed implementing agency for most of the time, Samaritan Purse.

The testimonies say that Samaritan Purse would then deliver the food relief to the camps for distribution to the waiting recipients, many of whom would be agents of OPM officials. The food would in the end find its way onto the open market.

Regarding cash logs, the testimonies are that bank accounts would be opened in the names of persons who are not genuine refugees and the cash, when eventually disbursed by the United Nations agencies, would eventually find its way into the pockets of OPM officials.

Our sources said the police has been collecting documentary and other evidence in the recent days, and that testimonies based on such information have formed



Career. Mr Apollo Kazungu joined the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) as an assistant commissioner in June 2004 and in 2010 became Commissioner for Refugees. Multiple sources have told Daily Monitor that he for many years was the dominant force regarding refugee matters and wielded more powers over the affairs of refugees than any other