



Golden Jubilee Award medallists with President Museveni. Three hundred and thirty people were rewarded with medals in recognition of their outstanding service

THE PAYMENT

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By Henry Sekanjako and Nicholas Wassajja

"Yes, I wanted to bring the Cuban doctors to assist us because ours were behaving badly, something that is unprofessional. A small clique wanted to incite others to abandon patients to die to cause a crisis for us, but I cannot get blackmailed," President Yoweri Museveni said yesterday.

He made the remarks during the International Labour Day celebrations at Sembabule town council playground, Sembabule district whose theme "Promoting the public spirit in the public sector".

The President was responding to pleas by the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU) chairperson, Wilson Owere, for the Government to reconsider recruiting Cuban doctors, arguing that Uganda has enough doctors and specialists that only need motivation to handle the sorry state of the health sector.

Museveni was not clear whether the deal with the Cuban government to hire its doctors still stands, but underscored the need for public servants to prioritise serving the country other than their pay slips.

"You cannot lecture me about working for Uganda. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) fought to liberate Uganda for no pay. We won and got a small pay. Look at the soldiers (Uganda People's Defence Forces), they are standing in the rain, they maintain peace for no pay or a small pay, how come they never go on strike? That is why I wanted to bring Cubans," he raged.

At the height of the doctors' strike in November last year, which paralysed health services for a month, the media reported that the Government had signed a memorandum of understanding with Cuba to recruit 200 doctors from Cuba to arrest the situation.

The health ministry permanent secretary, Dr Diana Atwine, last week said, if the deal went through, the Cuban doctors would be deployed in hospitals in the countryside, where most local doctors are reluctant to work.

According to the Government, each Cuban doctor will be paid \$1,500 (about sh54m) per month. Local doctors earn between sh1m

Museveni defends plan to recruit Cuban doctors

and sh5m, depending on experience and specialisation.

In an interview with *Saturday Vision* last week, Dr Ekwaro Obuku, the president of the Uganda Medical Association, asked the Government to re-examine its plan. "We produce 600 doctors and specialists annually. Does the Government want to deny local doctors a chance to work in their own country?" Obuku asked.

President Museveni's revelation was anchored on his earlier argument that although there is need to enhance salaries for public servants, it cannot be the Government's sole priority because the country has a number of challenges to address.

"Owere is saying that we should stop roads and focus on salaries, but salaries must be talked about holistically with national development and in a disciplined manner," he said.

"We are still working on roads and electricity; we can increase salaries, but we are talking about 40,000 civil servants out of 40 million Ugandans. This is just 1% of the population. So, as you fight for increments, do not forget other people without government jobs. How can we forget investing in the youth and women who are doing small jobs, yet for you (public servants) at least have something?" Museveni wondered.

Arts teachers can wait

Owere noted that for the Government to increase the salaries of only science teachers is contrary to public service standing orders because they would be earning more than their supervisors.

He said: "Mr President, it is good that the salaries of science teachers were increased, but even others must be looked into because having a headteacher who earns less, supervising colleagues getting more money

RE-EXAMINE PLAN

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would be problematic."

However, Museveni said he earns only sh3.6m monthly salary, yet there are officials in government parastatals who earn as much as sh40m a month. "Even with the small pay, I am the President. I continue serving the country and my authority can never be challenged," he said.

"If a history teacher goes away because of pay, we can easily replace them, but if a science teacher goes, replacing them might be a challenge. So, in terms of retention, we are desperate to retain teachers of science subjects. That is why they were prioritised," the President explained.

The annual event was also attended by Vice-President Edward Kiwanuka Ssekandi, Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga, Chief Justice Bart Katureebe and Prime Minister Dr Ruhakana Rugunda.

Also in attendance were ministers, MPs, the Chief of Defence Forces Gen. David Muhoozi, Inspector General of Police Martin Okoth Ochola, Commissioner General of Prisons John Byabashajja, members of the diplomatic corps, religious leaders and local leaders among other notables.

It was a chilly day after an early morning downpour. Dignitaries wore raincoats,

BRAVING THE WEATHER

Despite the heavy rains, thousands thronged Sembabule to attend the celebrations

gumboots and were holding umbrellas.

Despite the heavy rains, thousands thronged the area to attend the celebrations. Several vehicles of government officials and other dignitaries got stuck in the mud of the freshly cleared grounds. As tradition, officers of all armed forces mounted a parade. The heavy rains did not bother the officers as they kept in their lines to the surprise of the celebrants.

The President hailed his uniformed men for braving the downpour, but took a jibe at security officers that had not carried rain coats, asking them to always be prepared, just like him.

330 get medals

The Government gave 330 people medals in recognition of their outstanding service to the country. Among those awarded were Makerere University professors and Commonwealth 2018 medalists, such as Stella Chesang. Some of the medallists shared their excitement with *New Vision*.

"It feels good to receive a medal; you feel recognised by the Government. Most of us look at remuneration as the best token, but being awarded is the best," Prof. Henry Arinaitwe said.

Prof. Moses Musinguzi, who has worked for the Government for the last 24 years, said: "I feel good; I have worked hard to deserve the medal."

In figures

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, the proportion of the working age population that is employed stands at nine million persons, accounting for 47.5%. Although women constitute the majority of the working age population (10 million), only 40% are employed.

The proportion of the employed population that receives a wage or salary stands at 83% and 77% of the formal employers are in the private sector.

The national unemployment rate stands at 9% of the working age population.