43 IRAN-EVACUATED UGANDANS RETURN TOMORROW

KAMPALA

By Charles Etukuri and agencies

Several countries have organised evacuation flights to repatriate their nationals from the Gulf, including Uganda, following the outbreak of War between US/Israel and Iran.

The first group of 43 students who were successfully evacuated from Tehran, Iran's capital city, amid heavy bombardment by the US and Israel are expected to return tomorrow.

The Ugandans were among passengers on evacuation flights set to rescue tens of thousands of travellers stranded in the Middle East, even as some airlines resumed yesterday.

The US and Israeli attacks on Iran which began on Saturday, followed by Iranian counterattacks on Gulf states and Israel, have led to the closure of the airspace of a number of countries.

That has caused the cancellation of at least 12,903 flights between Saturday and Monday, according to Cirium, an aviation data analysis firm, or about 40% of planned flights.

Youth and children affairs state minister Balaam Barugahara yesterday said the group was expected to land at Entebbe International Airport aboard an Ethiopian Airlines flight. Barugahara added that efforts were ongoing to repatriate the remaining 53 students currently studying at Qom University in Iran.



Minister Barugahara

In a social media post on X, Barugahara thanked President Yoweri Museveni and Ugandan embassies in Iran and Turkey for successfully 'facilitating the return of our young people who were studying at Ahlul Bayt International University'.

On Monday, the foreign affairs ministry confirmed the evacuation through permanent secretary Aggrey Bagiire, who said several other Ugandans are still stuck in the Middle East, especially in Dubai, after several cities and towns in the Middle East were hit by Iranian missiles and drones. The attacks launched by Iran across the Gulf region are a response to ongoing bombardments against it by the US and Israel.

Commenting on the war, Uganda Communications Commission executive director Nyombi Thembo voiced his frustration saying: "Many people view the conflict between Iran and the US/Israel as a war between nations – a distant threat that doesn't require them to worry. But that isn't the case when an innocent boy from Kassanda gets entangled in the conflict while transiting to Barcelona for duty. Now, no planes are taking off or landing in Dubai. For how long, God knows – and another missile might land."

However, Bagiire said: "They are not the only ones who are stuck. The entire world is stuck in Dubai. Until the entire space is opened, we are just advising them to stay cautious where they are and ensure they are not in harm's way."

Numerous airlines are continuing to suspend their flights to the Middle East, at least for the coming days, including Uganda Airlines, Air France, British Airways, LOT, Norwegian and SAS.

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