

PWDs demand special vehicles at Entebbe International Airport

By Paul Kiwuuwa

People With Disabilities (PWDs) have asked the Government to provide ambulifts to ease their mobility to and from the aircrafts at Entebbe International Airport.

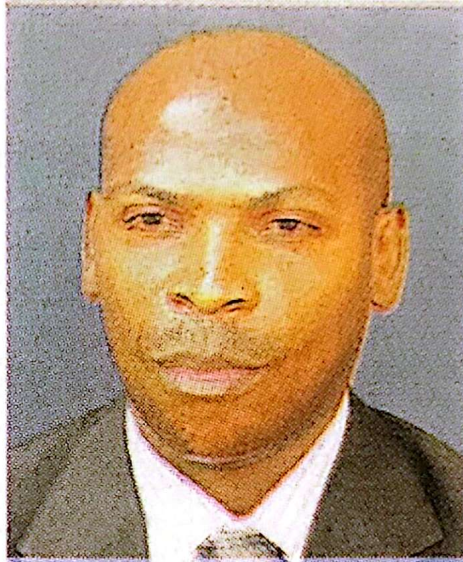
An ambulift is a special vehicle with a platform that raises to the height of the door of the airplanes, usually for transporting passengers with disabilities on wheelchairs or other facilities into and out of the main decks of all aircraft types.

They say Entebbe airport lacks such a facility that PWDs have to be carried manually in their wheelchairs to and from the aircrafts an act that humiliates the integrity of Ugandans and foreigners and may expose them to accidents.

Medi Ssengooba, an activist for PWDS also a programme officer of Disability Rights Fund, said: "Whenever I travel to other countries, I have to be lifted to and from the aircraft by airport staff, a thing that is demoralising and sometimes it affects my body."

According to Alex Ndeezi, the Central PWDs MP, Uganda has over four million PWDs, of these two million are physically impaired, two million are deaf while 1.7 million are visually impaired. Others are the little people of Uganda and over 200 are albinos.

"Physical features that people



Alex Ndeezi, PWDS MP for the Central region

without disability take for granted can present serious problems for PWDs, mostly because their needs were not considered in designing those features," Ssengooba explained.

He raised the issue during training for journalists who report on issues of disability at Esella County Hotel, Kira in Wakiso district on Wednesday.

Ssengooba also complained that the airport toilets lack facilities for PWDs, saying they are too small to be accessed by PWDs using wheelchairs.

"The toilet is often the first place visited on arrival and the last stop for departing passengers. Our restrooms at Entebbe are in a very bad condition and need an

overhaul PWDs who use wheelchairs can't access them. Most airports I have been to are pre-standard and cater for all kinds of PWDs," Ssengooba explained.

He reminded the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the government agency responsible for licensing, monitoring, and regulating aviation matters, that PWDs also pay taxes and expect international accepted services to which they are entitled.

The Bubulo West MP, R. Mutonyi, told Parliament Wednesday that the Entebbe airport has no ramp for PWDs to access the airport facilities using wheelchairs and white canes or other forms of devices.

CAA public affairs manager Vianney Luggya said the facility has ambulifts for transporting passengers with disabilities into and out of the main decks, including luggage.

"The facility is managed by Entebbe Handling Services (ENHAS), and DAS air cargo who handle both departures and arrivals. They also have in stock wheelchairs designed for use by PWDs at the airport," he said.

Luggya added: "We have created a special immigration counter to cater for PWDS to be handled. It also handles the airport check-in," he said.