

Private school owners protest scrapping of USE

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KAMPALA. Owners of private secondary schools partnering with government to implement Universal Secondary Education (USE) have protested government's decision to stop funding their institutions to enable children from poor families access higher education.

They argue that they are readily accessible and operate in areas where there are no government-aided schools for low income earners.

They also say government's support to these private schools has made it possible for majority of the children to advance their education.

Mr Jackson Aryampa, the interim chairperson of National Association of Private Universal Secondary Education Schools (NAPUSES) for

eastern region, also accused government of not paying them fully to meet costs for the children they have been sponsoring.

He said government still owes private schools lots of money.

"Let them first pay us our arrears before they phase out free education from private schools. They have been paying us only 60 per cent instead of 100 per cent [of the costs]," Mr Aryampa said.

He warned that unless government convinces them on why they want to drop them from the USE programme, they would seek court redress.

"We want government to give us a clear reason why they want to scrap free education in private schools. If they fail, we are ready to take them to court. The Government should not take us as competitors but rather service providers," Mr Aryampa said. In an earlier interview, Mr Ismail Mulindwa, the Education

ministry commissioner in charge of private schools, told *Saturday Monitor* they will stop USE funding to private schools because government has now built capacity in areas where they didn't have any government-aided schools.

Withdraw in phases

However he hastened to add that they will withdraw in phases.

Since 2007, government has been paying Shs47,000 per term for each student accessing free education in these schools.

At least Shs52b is budgeted annually, to support the USE scheme in private schools, but government now plans to save and use the fund to construct own institutions.

Mr Isaac Katenya, a delegate to the Federation of Non-State Education Institutions, warned that the scrapping of USE in private institutions will adversely affect children from poor families.

"Government should think twice before scrapping free education in private schools. Most of the parents cannot afford to pay school fees," he said, warning further that government would be indirectly forcing out the children to drop out of school.

There are 874 private secondary schools currently accommodating 416,237 students under the USE programme.

Efforts to reach the ministry of Education spokesperson were futile.

PAYING ARREARS

The private schools proprietors says that before government thinks of closing them out of the programme, they should first be paid their arrears that they have not been paid over the years.