

Energy PS Isabalija's contract terminated, reason unknown

By Mary Karugaba
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The Government last night confirmed that it had terminated the contract of Dr. Stephen Isabalija, who has been the permanent secretary (PS) of the energy ministry for barely 10 months.

Isabalija was appointed energy ministry PS by President Yoweri Museveni last November, replacing Fred Kabagambe Kaliisa, who had held the same position since 1997. He becomes the first PS who has served for the shortest time in many years.

The Government spokesperson, Ofwono Opondo, first confirmed Isabalija's sacking in a tweet.

"Dr. Stephen Isabalija's contract terminated and he is to be paid one month's salary in lieu," Ofwono tweeted.

Later, Ofwono told *New Vision* on phone that Isabalija's contract was terminated by the President, who also directed that the departing PS be paid a one month's salary.

Ofwono, however, said the President did not give reasons

for relieving Isabalija of his duties, but he suspected that the PS could have been removed for failing to meet the expectations of the appointing authority, the infrastructure projects deadlines and "the push and pull" within the ministry.

"The President did not give the reason, but I suspect he could have been fired due to failure to meet the appointing authority's expectations," he said.

The state minister for energy, Simon D'Ujanga, earlier said he was not aware of the development even after hours of consultation with the officials in the ministry.

"I am not aware of the development. I have not seen any communication to that effect," he said when *New Vision* contacted him. He asked for time to make consultations, but still said he hadn't confirmed the development.

"I have consulted the people in the ministry and they said they have not seen any communication to that effect. I have even tried to call the PS, his phone is not available," he



Isabalija

said. Isabalija is an academic and a management specialist.

When *New Vision* contacted Isabalija and asked him about the reports, he simply ended the call without any comment.

New Vision learnt that Isabalija wasn't in office for the greater part of the day yesterday.

The President has replaced him with, Robert Kasande, who is the current director of the petroleum directorate, in an acting capacity.

At the time the news Isabalija's sacking was trickling in, the President was reportedly setting off, together with, among others, energy minister Irene Muloni and Kasande, for a trip

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to oil-producing Equatorial Guinea. Museveni and his team left for the visit on Thursday morning.

Possible causes

Isabalija was serving as the board chairperson of Uganda Electricity Generation Company Limited (UEGCL) before his appointment as PS.

In the run-up to his appointment as PS, there were reports of an alleged fight

between a team led by him at UEGCL and another linked to then PS Kabagambe at the ministry headquarters.

The two teams were, on a number of times, summoned to State House, Entebbe and reportedly clashed before the President over the implementation of, among others, Karuma and Isimba dam projects. At the time, the ministry was facing accusations of mishandling implementation of the Karuma and Isimba dam projects.

Isabalija's appointment as energy PS was seen as victory for his UEGCL team.

However, as Kabagambe handed over office to Isabalija, he (Isabalija) "clarified" that he had not been fighting Kabagambe.

"I want to clarify what the press has been writing. We have not been fighting the PS. We could have disagreed, but we did not fight," Isabalija said.

He said Kabagambe told him he had been preparing to handover as PS for four years. "I did not prepare for this takeover. I am a student here and I need to learn a lot," he

said, adding, "however, there is nothing that is impossible."

But Kabagambe, in his remarks, cautioned his successor arguing that the oil and gas, mineral and power are industries of knowledge.

"Either one knows or he does not know. One has to learn, listen and engage experts in order to give sustainable policy and managerial directions," he added.

According to sources, Isabalija's nine-month stint at the energy ministry hasn't been a bed of roses. The period has reportedly been characterised by disagreements among the members of the top management.

There were reports that Isabalija's problems could be linked to the recent decision to pick the Albertine Graben Refinery Consortium (AGRC) for the refinery project. The AGRC consortium comprising General Electric (GE) Oil and Gas (UK), YAATRA Ventures LLC (US), Intracontinent Asset Holdings Ltd (IA) and Saipem SpA (Italy), was given exclusive rights to negotiate the core refinery project terms.