

DIPLOMATIC BREACH

Madhvani is faulted for briefing MPs on the mistreatment of Ugandan girls in UAE without consulting the two governments

By Mary Karugaba

Uganda's envoy to United Arab Emirates (UAE) Nimisha Madhvani is in trouble for reportedly inviting and briefing Members of Parliament about the mistreatment Ugandan girls are subjected to in the Emirates.

Madhvani was on May 10, recalled to Kampala, a few days after she was reportedly summoned and grilled by the UAE authorities over the mistreatment and death allegations.

Although the letter from the acting permanent secretary of the foreign affairs ministry Ambassador Isaac Ssebulime does not mention the reasons for the recall, senior foreign ministry sources said Madhvani "seriously breached the diplomatic communication channels" when she invited the MPs and briefed them on the mistreatment of Ugandan girls in UAE without consulting the two governments.

Needed home for 'consultation'

The letter instead says Madhvani was needed back home for "consultation".

"I have been directed to instruct you to report to the headquarters immediately for consultations. You should hand over to Sam Omara who will be in charge of the mission as charge d'affaires while you are away," Ssebulime wrote in the letter.

"By copy of this letter, the accounting officer is directed to facilitate your travel accordingly. Your urgent action will be highly appreciated," Ssebulime said.

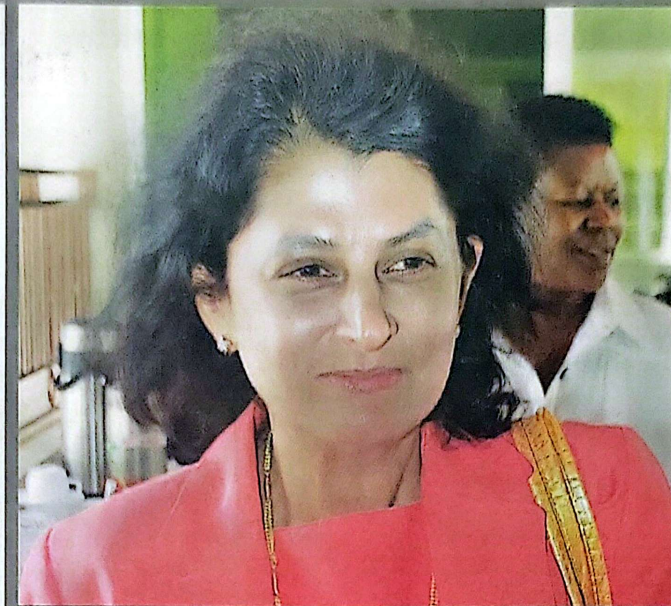
New Vision was not able to get a comment from the ambassador.

According to sources, Madhvani, through the embassy, reportedly invited a team of 10 MPs on the budget committee without first consulting the UAE and Ugandan authorities. The legislators included Butambala MP and internal affairs shadow minister Muhammad Muwanga Kivumbi.

The MPs, led by the committee chairperson Amos Lugolobi, travelled to UAE to assess the financial requirements of the embassy. The embassy had requested for a supplementary budget of over \$1m for the Dubai expo, construction of a "rescue facility" for the girls who had run away as a result of mistreatment and other embassy issues.

During the meeting with the embassy officials, the MPs reportedly demanded to know why the girls were running away from their bosses.

The embassy's accounting officer gave the MPs a report which confirmed that the girls



Nimisha Madhvani was recalled from her envoy duties in the UAE last week

Envoy in trouble over report on abuse of girls

were being mistreated and some had even committed suicide.

Ugandan girls committing suicide

According to the report, 16 Ugandan girls in Oman and Abu Dhabi committed suicide between March and October last year.

On his return, Muwanga Kivumbi during the defence and internal affairs committee meeting with the internal affairs minister, Gen. Jeje Odongo, asked the minister for an explanation.

"Recently we visited Abu Dhabi and we were shocked when our embassy gave us a report that between March and October last

year, 16 Ugandan girls in Oman and Abu Dhabi committed suicide. Most of these girls' passports are confiscated and sold into slavery when they get to the UAE," Muwanga told the internal affairs officials.

Muwanga said during the tour, the MPs visited one of the labour recruitment centres that he described as "slave markets" where they also attempted to buy some.

During the meeting, the MPs also raised issues of connivance between immigration officials, Police and labour export companies, especially at Uganda's borders and Entebbe Airport, where Ugandan girls are illegally

DAMNING REPORT

The report says 16 Ugandan girls in Oman and Abu Dhabi had committed suicide between March and October last year

smuggled out of the country. Odongo promised to investigate.

According to sources, the UAE authorities were extremely angered by the accusations. As a consequence, a high-level delegation led by one of the emirs that was due to visit Uganda reportedly cancelled the trip in protest against the accusations.

Sources said the cancellation of the trip has angered President Yoweri Museveni.

In October last year, two legislators Mwine Mpaka (Youth Western) and David Abala (Ngora County) also issued a report saying 48 Ugandans in the Middle East had died. They alleged that 35 Ugandans had committed suicide, four died of heart attacks, two died in separate road accidents and one of natural causes.

Contacted yesterday, foreign affairs state minister Okello Oryem declined to comment on the recall of the envoy from Dubai.

"I have not been briefed on that issue," the minister said.

However, a senior source in the ministry told *New Vision* that the ministry was angered by Madhvani's action of inviting the MPs without first consulting the foreign affairs minister.

The officials reportedly complained that instead of "briefing" MPs on such a matter, Madhvani should have first raised those issues with the UAE foreign affairs ministry, UAE labour ministry, Uganda's foreign affairs minister Sam Kutesa or gender and labour minister Janet Mukwaya.

"What she did was wrong. She should not have invited the MPs all the way from Uganda without consulting the Ugandan and UAE authorities. If she had done that, she would not have needed to invite MPs. She would have gotten a clear explanation from the authorities," a source said.

Licensed companies

Early this month, while appearing before the foreign affairs committee of Parliament, Mukwaya told the MPs that 94 companies had been licensed to export labour abroad.

The minister also told the MPs that the Government had signed memorandums of understanding with different countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia among other Arab countries for legal labour export.

In 2016, the Government banned the export of labour, especially domestic labour over complaints of mistreatment of Ugandans abroad.