

NDA halts ban on pharmacies

By Moses Mulondo

Following the pressure generated by Parliament and other stakeholders, the National Drug Authority has quashed the ban on the establishment of new pharmacies in Kampala and municipalities.

The NDA officials made the decision yesterday while appearing before the Parliament health committee which had summoned them to explain the rationale for the ban which has attracted a lot of controversy.

Quoting Article 40 of the Constitution which gives Ugandans the right to do business, the committee chairman, Dr. Michael Bukonya, told the officials that the ban was unconstitutional and unfair to Ugandans.

"What NDA needs to do is to provide adequate incentives for the pharmacies that are established in rural areas in the same way special benefits are given to doctors sent to rural areas," said Bukonya.

The NDA officials, led by the board chairman, Dr. Medard Bitekyerezo, and the executive secretary, Donna Asimwe Kusemererwa, were inundated with criticism for what the MPs called ridiculous ban.

Kalungu West MP Joseph Ssewungu said: "The NDA Act does not give you powers to stop the establishment of pharmacies as long as someone meets the requirements."

Buyaga West MP Barnabas Tinkasimire said: "Your directives overstep the mandate we gave you as Parliament in the Act. You are violating the rights of Ugandans. We can withdraw the mandate we gave you because you are misusing it. You make it difficult for Ugandans to do business."



Helen Byomire, NDA's director for product safety, Bitekyerezo and Kusemererwa appearing before the health committee of Parliament yesterday. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ MP Joseph Ssewungu said the NDA Act does not give NDA officials powers to stop establishment of pharmacies in an area as long as someone meets the requirements.

Kasambya County MP Gaffa Mbwatekamwa said: "I have read the Act and the Constitution. There is no section that allows these people to make such directives. We are in a free market economy. A Ugandan is free to set up a business anywhere."

Responding to the outbursts from the angry MPs, Asimwe first made futile attempts to justify the ban.

"We have an oversupply of pharmacies in Kampala and municipalities. This has led to illegal activities. That is why we have decided to put a temporary halt on the establishment of pharmacies in those areas," she stated.

Kusemererwa angered MPs when she said the ban was meant to act as an incentive to push pharmacies to rural areas where they are few.

Mbwatekamwa mocked her by questioning the level of her education, if she could not realise that a ban is not an incentive.

Kusemererwa, after consulting with other officials from NDA, told the MPs that the key incentive is that pharmacies established in rural areas are charged less fees than those in Kampala.

"Due to the feedback we have received from you and other stakeholders, we shall revisit the ban," Kusemererwa said.

Following remarks from Mbwatekamwa and Tinkasimire over the need to stop the ban immediately for the sake of businesses that have been sabotaged, the committee chairman, Bukonya, said: "As a committee we demand that you immediately lift the ban."

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