

Demands by health workers are justified

EDITOR: I am writing in response to an article in the *Sunday Vision* of July 30, titled; "demand for big salaries harbors sinister motives", by Ofwono-Opondo. In this article, Opondo intentionally makes inaccurate, inappropriate and frankly quite annoying assertions.

How can the Government's spokesperson state that public servants are pushing for salary increases in order to bring down the Government! Why does Ofwono-Opondo want Ugandans to believe that the threats of sit down strike have opposition elements behind them? Yet the labour laws of Uganda provide for industrial action?

Why not look at basic facts? Why not see that Ugandan civil servants are the least paid in East Africa? Or would you rather have all medical doctors run away for greener pastures instead

of staying and working in Uganda as they demand for better salaries and improved working conditions?

The likes of Ofwono-Opondo and other highly placed government officials should know that a medical officer working in a regional referral hospital takes home a salary of sh900,000.

This salary by comparison is way smaller than the fuel allowances of senior executives in government departments. Indeed, it is expected that this good doctor will have to buy food, pay rent, travel to work and also pay school fees for his children.

Ofwono-Opondo should think about the hustle a medical doctor goes through, constantly improvising amidst scarcity of medicines, equipment and even a robust human resource infrastructure. Think about this doctor

who has to stay awake all night performing emergency surgery and other acute illnesses. Think about what would happen if you got an accident on one of the highways and you were rushed to one of the regional referral hospitals only to find a hungry and exhausted medical officer! And while this doctor is resuscitating the accident victims, he has no gloves, no diagnostic equipment to locate and assess your injury, no painkillers to give you.

Indeed, Ugandans are only too aware to expect more than the current state of poor health services. Ugandans are desperate and seeking healthcare from spiritual healers, comen and private health facilities as the public health sector is yet to meet their expectations.

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PICTURE BY DRAKE SSENTONGO