

Doctors vow to continue strike

Disregarded. The doctors have disregarded Dr Jane Ruth Aceng's directives vowing to continue with the strike until their demands are fully met.

BY LILLIAN NAMAGEMBE
lnamagembe@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. Doctors under their umbrella organisation Uganda Medical Association (UMA) yesterday dismissed to government's labelling of their strike as illegal and threatened to withdraw emergency services to patients.

The doctors went on strike on Monday, November 6, paralysing work in public health facilities and leaving patients stranded.

The doctors, who cited the need to improve their terms of employment as the reason for their industrial action, resolved to keep providing emergency services, including surgery and caesarian section during the time of the strike.

But in reaction to a statement by Health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng on Thursday evening, Dr Ekwaro Obuku, the president of UMA, said: "This negative action by the minister of Health has threatened the progress made by the Prime Minister, and the doctors' fraternity has considered escalation of industrial action. The doctors are considering withdrawing emergency health services."

When the doctors threatened to strike, President Museveni warned that he would use guerilla tactics to quell it, but he had not spoken out on the strike by the time we went to press with the responsibility to address the matter falling on Dr Aceng, the Health minister.

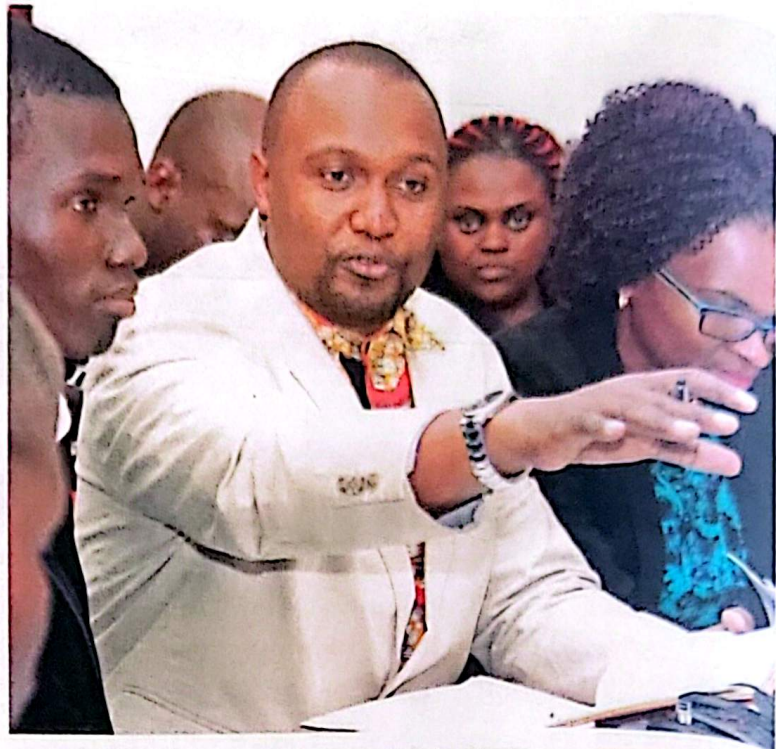
She said UMA, which organised the strike, is not a registered union that can legally lobby for labour rights, ordering the doctors to resume work with immediate effect.

Dr Aceng's statement

In an eight-point statement, Dr Aceng said the doctors did not give the mandatory 90-day notice, and that they did not follow the public service procedure for declaring industrial action.

Dr Aceng said during her press conference that there is a court order restraining Dr Obuku and others from "interfering with or any matter connected with the Uganda Medical Workers Union pending the court ruling."

The tough-talking Dr Aceng directed UMA officials to stop



Vow. Uganda Medical Association president, Dr Ekwaro Obuku addresses journalists during a media briefing in Kampala yesterday. The association has vowed to continue with the strike. PHOTO BY ABUBAKER LUBOWA

"interfering" with the members of the association members willing to work, promising protection for doctors who get back to work, and that intern doctors who fail to comply with the directive will have their internships terminated and have to reapply.

Dr Aceng supplied copies of a separate circular, which directed Resident District Commissioners to monitor and ensure that doctors report back to duty country-wide, failure of which she said they would face disciplinary action.

Those doctors who had been "misled" to join the strike but would abandon it after her order, she said, would not be subjected to disciplinary action.

Dr Obuku and the other leaders of UMA, however, disregarded Dr Aceng's directives and statements. On the legality of UMA, Dr Obuku asked one of his colleagues who listed former vice president Specioza Wandira Kazibwe, Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda, and Dr Aceng herself, among other

ministers, as members of what the minister said was an illegal association.

Dr Obuku provoked laughter when he threatened to summon Dr Aceng for a disciplinary hearing over the matter.

Intern doctors

Represented by their president, Dr Robert Goloba, the intern doctors who Dr Aceng warned that they risk having their training forfeited defied the directive, saying that they can only resume their duties if the ministry increases their allowances to Shs2.5m.

"An intern can not work without supervisors (who are currently on strike), and its upon that they laid down their tools," Dr Goloba said.

The doctors said they expected to meet with the President on Friday, November 17 after which they will have another extraordinary general meeting the following day.

Ugandans will be wishing that the strike would have ended by then.

Demands

Enhanced salaries:

Doctors among other things, demand enhanced salaries and allowances, for overtime, housing, transport, medical risk and retention.

Intern doctor:

An intern doctor, currently earning a gross salary of Shs960,000 want their allowances increased to Shs2.5m.

Medical officer or teaching assistant:

They also want a medical officer or teaching assistant to be paid Shs15m per month and accorded a two-bedroom house and a 2.5cc vehicle, while a senior consultant doctor or professor be paid a gross salary of Shs48m, a five-bedroom house, 4.0cc vehicle and three domestic workers. Currently, a senior consultant doctor earns about Shs3.4 million, consultant Shs2.6m, and a medical officer Shs1.1 million.

Nurses and midwives:

Doctors also want salaries for nurses and midwives enhanced to about Shs6.5 million in addition to a three-bedroom house, 2.0cc vehicle and one domestic worker.

When doctors went on strike in Kenya

It was on March 14, that doctors in Kenya finally halted the strike they had been on, after coming to an agreement with the Kenyan government.

On December 4, 2016, the doctors went on strike demanding better salaries and improved working conditions. The medical staff wanted a deal signed between the Kenya Medical Practitioners' Union and the Kenya government in 2013

to be implemented. The agreement included a pay raise for doctors and other provisions.

The government offered a 40 per cent raise but this was rejected by the union. The back and forth between the two camps went on for 100 days and ended on March 14, after the union and the government signed an agreement in which the doctors were to receive increased allowances as

negotiations on other demands continued. The strike however took a toll on the citizens as a number were said to have died due to lack of medical assistance.

The ministry of health drafted a confidential report which showed that there had been a rise in stillbirths and prematurely born babies, data they say was drawn from their District Health Information Systems.