How 43 Ugandans braved bus ride from Iran city to Turkey

Through three major provinces of Iran, the students of Ahlul Bayt International University, braved the journey and left their safety in the hands of the Almighty.

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

Alone and frightened, 43 Ugandan students braved a 950-kilometre bus journey from the Iranian capital, Tehran, to Bazargan, the Turkish border.

The Ugandan government secured the bus to evacuate the students from the ongoing Israel/USA-Iran war.

The 15-hour journey that started at 5am, came only a few hours after the USA and ally Israel struck Iran, killing more than 200 people, including the Iranian supreme leader Ali Al-Khamenei.

Iran, which had been engaged in negotiations with the US over its nuclear programme right up to the attack, in ... launched retaliatory strikes against Israel, as well as several Gulf Arab states, including Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, and Bahrain, which host US military bases and other assets.

The frightened students were repeatedly greeted with sounds of explosions through all places they passed, besides negotiating several roadblocks manned by Iranian soldiers.

"The journey was traumatising," said Mr Aloysious Ssegawa, one of the students. "But thank God we are now here waiting to come back home," he added.

Officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged the students moved alone in the bus from Tehran to the Turkish border but said it was because the evacuation was done fast.

Mr Vincent Bagiire, the ministry's permanent secretary, said: "When the evacuation is going on, you look at efficiency and use the fastest means possible. So, th... why they were alone. Sending our officials to accompany them would have been late."

Inside the journey

Through three major provinces of Iran, including Qazvin, Zanjan, and East Azerbaijan, the students of Ahlul Bayt International University, located in the heart of Tehran, braved the journey and left their safety in the hands of the Almighty.

"We were alone on the bus, the Embassy gave us the bus, and we boarded, but we kept communicating with the ambassador throughout the journey...," Mr Ssegawa said.

Officials from the Ugandan Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, picked them up from the border, where they drove to Istanbul, the Turkish capital, to wait for their flights scheduled for Thursday this week.

The ambassador, last Tuesday, met with the students at the university and informed them about the impending war, which the government, he reportedly said, suspected would break out soon, and asked them to start preparing to leave the country and watch it from out in case it happens.

"The majority of us booked t... flights...



everyone had set off. However, eight students chose to remain in Iran.

The 43 evacuees drove in a bus from Tehran, covering a distance of 138km, and made their first stopover at Qazvin Province, where they got some foodstuffs and embarked on the journey.

"It was at night, but we were scared because we could hear explosions all over. I recall we moved through about six roadblocks before reaching our destination," Mr Ssegawa said.

After this brief stop, the students then were driven through the towns of Takestan, Qerveh, Abhar, Amidabad, Khyerabad, and others before reaching Zanjan Province, which is 323KM from Tehran, where they changed from one bus to another. These then continued and braved another 300KM and made their second stopover at Tabriz, the biggest city in the East Azerbaijan Province of Iran.

Tabriz and Zanjan are among the major cities that were struck by the US and Israel on Saturday.

Tabriz hosts Iran's significant military assets, including the 2nd Tactical Air Base (TAB-2) with MiG-29 and F-5 fighter jets, and a strategic "missile city" in the mountains featuring underground silos for ballistic missiles like the Shahab-1, -2, and -3, while Zanjan was identified as a location for key Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) military infrastructure, particularly in the realm of ballistic missile technology and armor.

The USA and Israel hit these two cities on Saturday, hours before the unprotected group of Ugandan students passed through.

"On our way, we could see missiles in the air, fighter jets bombing. We tried to sleep but the rapid explosions would wake us up every time," Mr Ssegawa said.

He added that the group arrived at the Iran-Turkey border at midday, but clearance, which even required the Ankara Embassy officials to fly there, took 12 hours, and were cleared into the country at midnight.

Between the border and Istanbul, Mr Ssegawa said they made six stopovers, where the students were allowed to freshen up and eat a good meal. The entire journey, according to Mr Ssegawa, took 27 hours.

Mr Balaam Barugahara, the State minister for Youth, yesterday, through his official X-platform, said the students would arrive in Entebbe at 6pm. But the air ticket from Xplore Travel Services showed the students were expected to depart Istanbul Airport on Thursday, tomorrow, and land at Bole Airport, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, aboard Ethiopian Airlines at 12:55pm, depart Bole Airport at 3:40pm, and arrive at Entebbe International Airport at 5:45pm.

About Ahlul Bayt University

The university and its official student dormitory, where the students who are part of the 70 who got scholarships in February 2025 are studying, is located in the South of Tehran, near the Imam Khomeini shrine.

Imam Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini was the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and served as its first supreme leader from 1979 until his death on June 3, 1989, before Khamenei, who was killed by strikes on Saturday, took over.

The university, given its location on 35 Artesh Street, loosely translated as "Military Street," is surrounded by military facilities and was prone to attacks in case of war.



Some of the evacuated students in Istanbul wait for their flight scheduled for tomorrow. PHOTOS/ COURTESY

My ordeal. The journey was traumatising...But thank God we are now here waiting to come back home."- Aloysious Ssegawa, one of the students.

EVACUATED STUDENTS
1. Sharif Kimbowa
2. Danson Twinomujuni
3. Brenda Mbajja
4. Denis Nasasira
5. Nickson Kiremire B.
6. Edison Ssali
7. Christine Dukundane
8. Waldha Namuddu
9. Patricia Grace Nabwire
10. Jonathan Ntege
22. Davis Kankya
23. Musa M. Bogere
24. Chrispus Nkaijagye
25. Musa Ssemakula
26. Samwel Rutaborwa
27. Oscar Nyegyema
28. Isac Eling
29. Bashilra Nakubulwa
30. Emmanuel Wandwasi
31. Lighton Nannyonga
32. Jonan Gumoshabe
33. Andrew Muhwezi

STEADFIN

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

SteadFin Uganda SACCO Ltd hereby gives notice and invites all its members to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held as follows:

Date: Friday March 27th 2026
Venue: Silver Springs Hotel, Bugolobi
Time: 2:00pm - 4:00pm

AGENDA
1. Adoption of the Agenda
2. Admission of new members

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