

The fight over drugs

BY TOM MALABA

tmalaba@ug.nationmedia.com

The Uganda Police Force has continued to take the beating; this time round it's for dealing in narcotics.

Until the death of Johnson Ayera, the first Commandant Anti-narcotics unit, the police had contained the drug problem. Johnson Ayera was targeted and poisoned by drugs barons at Valley point bar in Naalya. Ayera first developed differences with one of his bosses, who he had charged with stealing a photocopying machine that had been donated to the Anti-Narcotics unit before the 'suspect' too charge of it.

Ayera's death has never been conclusively investigated to-date, and family sources say no postmortem was done on his body. He had built what many regarded as an effective anti-narcotics unit.

In the aftermath of Ayera's death, all the officers who had attended various anti-narcotics training courses, some of who included the current Executive Director National Medical Stores, Moses Kamabale, were pushed away from the unit.

At the time, the unit's biggest challenge were security officers at Entebbe International Airport (Read The Monitor, October 14, 2001, Rogue Security Men On Take in Drug Trafficking--Police

Fights at Entebbe

The Entebbe Anti-Narcotics Unit has until now continued to be a fighting point either between individual police officers and their bosses, or the police and other security agencies as different individuals and groups attempt to facilitate drug trafficking, which is big money business.

These fights are said to have caused bad blood between a number of senior police officers over the years.

After Ayera's death, allegations of police in Entebbe impounding drugs and interchanging them with flour have continued to affect the operations of the unit.

On August 9, 2011, Uganda burnt a drug haul worth an estimated Shs5b seized between 2009 and 2011 to send a message to traffickers, saying it would no longer tolerate being used as a transit point.

The drugs impounded at Entebbe International airport included opium, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine (glass).

Most of the traffickers are said to come from South America and South Eastern Asia with the view of connecting to Europe.

In Uganda, they mainly use swallowers who swallow these drugs wrapped as pellets or capsules to avoid detection at security checks.

In 2006, a Tanzanian national called John Mwanjabala, who was smuggling over 100 heroin pellets worth 27 million shillings in his stomach died on December 8 at Entebbe Grade B hospital.

Recently, the police pathologist, Dr Moses Byaruhanga, said they were stuck with a body of male from which they had extracted narcotic drugs. The body was found dumped in Kampala and taken to the City mortuary.

Beyond the fight

Reports indicate that Uganda is slowly becoming a market for illicit drugs, especially to University students in Kampala, Entebbe and Jinja. Students are said to use drugs to give them a 'high' and in other instances to gain courage to commit crime.

Uganda's weak anti-narcotics laws have been identified as a pull factor for drug trafficking. Without a deterrent law, the argument goes, drugs traffickers in Uganda get away with sentences of between three months and one year in prison.

Two countries that have the death penalty for drug-trafficking are Egypt and China. As a matter a fact, there are currently, 20 Ugandans on death row in China, convicted for drug-trafficking, waiting for the gallows.

However, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Bill 2007 carries the penalty of life imprisonment for drug trafficking.