

National News

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The tax body insists it followed procedure and immediately notified security agencies after the interception.

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

The Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) has provided fresh details on the interception of \$10.2 million (about Shs37.6 billion) allegedly smuggled into the country by a Ugandan returning from Turkey, seeking to clarify issues raised in earlier reports.

In an interview with *Daily Monitor*, URA Assistant Commissioner for Public and Corporate Affairs Robert Kalumba said they acted within their mandate and promptly involved all relevant institutions. Below are excerpts from the interview;

At what stage was the cargo flagged?

There was no whistle-blower in this case. The container arrived at the Lexus Warehouses in Namanve and was subjected to routine physical verification. Previously, verification relied heavily on invoices, which made it easy for some traders to misdeclare goods. For example, someone would declare a few items on paper while concealing large quantities inside the container.

We shifted to physical verification to address that gap. In this case, the cargo was declared as kitchen items.

URA answers queries on \$10m cash smuggling case

During inspection, officers found forks placed on top of a box, but on closer examination, they discovered cash hidden underneath. This confirms why physical verification is important, even though some traders may not favour it.

When did URA involve security agencies?

Immediately after the discovery. We informed the Bank of Uganda, the Financial Intelligence Authority, and other security agencies. That is the standard procedure, and we followed it without delay.

Why did URA take weeks to speak publicly about the matter?

The priority in such situations is not public communication but securing the money and notifying the relevant authorities. We acted immediately where it mattered. The timing of when we speak publicly should not be the main issue as long as due process was followed.

Did URA reward the staff involved before investigations were complete?

Claims that staff was given a Shs50 million cash reward are false. There is a formal procedure for recognising staff,



Robert Kalumba, URA Assistant Commissioner for Public and Corporate Affairs

and it does not involve such payments. The officer involved was only given a certificate in appreciation of her conduct.

Why expose staff while the suspect remains unidentified?

URA position.
I go there quite often to see my parents. The thing is the time I spend there is limited and putting a home up there to me would appear like keeping sources idle instead of channelling the same where you are likely to get maximum benefits.
- Robert Kalumba, URA Assistant Commissioner for Public and Corporate Affairs.

URA did not officially release the identity or images of the officer. The photos circulating are not from us. What I can say is that the officer demonstrated exceptional integrity. For someone to report such a large sum of money requires honesty of a high order. She deserves recognition, and she is safe.

Why are URA and police giving differing accounts on who is handling the case?

Matters of investigation fall under security agencies, so it is best to seek clarification from them. From our side, we ensured all relevant institutions were notified and involved as required.

Who is leading the investigation?

The matter was handed over to the appropriate authorities, including the Financial Intelligence Authority and other security agencies. They are best placed to provide updates on the progress of investigations.

What is URA's role now?

Our role was to detect the anomaly, secure the money and hand over the case. Issues of investigation, arrest and prosecution fall outside our mandate, so we cannot comment on them.

Which clearing firm and shipping companies were involved?

I do not have those details readily available. They will be provided by investigators once inquiries are complete.

Has the matter been escalated internationally, including to Turkey?

That is a matter for the investigating agencies. URA fulfilled its responsibility by handing over the money and notifying the relevant institutions.

Who owns the companies linked to the shipment?

Ownership and accountability will be established after investigations are concluded by the responsible authorities.