

Lokech replaces Kayanja in Somalia

By David Lumu

Brig. Paul Lokech has replaced Brig. Kayanja Muhanga as the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) contingent commander under the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

According to Brig. Richard Karemire, the UPDF spokesperson, Muhanga handed over office to Lokech yesterday, at a ceremony held in Mogadishu, Somalia. The commander of the Land Forces, Maj. Gen. Peter Elwelu, presided over the hand-over ceremony.

"Brigadier Lokech succeeds Brig. Muhanga, who has completed his tour of duty, having served as contingent commander for the past one year," Karemire said yesterday.

The UPDF official said Lokech's deployment will be the second tour in Somalia, having served as commander of the Ugandan contingent from 2011 to 2012.

A statement issued yesterday by the UPDF emphasised that Muhanga has played a towering role to his time as contingent commander, with key highlights being helping the Somalia national army to build capacity ahead of the planned and phased complete AMISOM exit, which is slated for next year.

Uganda's first batch of troops, about 200 men and officers, are expected to return home at the end of this month.

Speaking at the handover ceremony, Elwelu said the onus of bringing total peace in Somalia lies in the hands of the Somali National Security Forces and the citizens.

"You need to focus on the Somali National Security

Forces. It is only the Somalis who can bring everlasting peace and stability to the country. Nobody else can achieve that, no matter how powerful you may be," he said.

Elwelu added: "As UPDF, we have made our contribution. We have made extraordinary sacrifices and we have accomplished our mission of creating an enabling environment for the Somalis to liberate their own country."

The United Nations has demanded that AMISOM be

"Lokech's deployment will be the second tour in Somalia." Karemire

downsized to 21,626 troops by the end of this year, as part of the start of the process of paving way for the Somali National Security Forces to take charge of their affairs.

Lokech's fact file

Brig. Lokech has served as Uganda's defence attaché to Russia, and has been the commander of the UPDF second division, until two days ago, when he was appointed contingent commander of the Ugandan troops in Somalia for the second time.

During his first stint as UPDF contingent commander in Somalia, Lokech played a leading role in ejecting al-Shabaab militants from Mogadishu in 2011.