

OPINION

Doctors, please get back to work

Doctors have been on strike this week. They are seeking a dramatic increase in their remuneration and working conditions. Efforts by the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, and health state minister, Sara Opendi, to convince the medics to go back to work fell on deaf ears. A meeting with the President has been organised for later this month.

The strike has inconvenienced thousands of consumers of public health facilities, many of whom cannot afford to access private health services. The striking doctors argue that their pay is not commensurate with the services they provide. They claim they have been made promises in the past which have not materialised or lived up to their expectations and hence the strike action.

Few people will argue that public sector doctors work under less than ideal conditions. Fewer still would dispute the importance of their role in society. Most people think their demands for higher pay are justified, the only argument being the extent of the increments.

The Government argues that it has numerous pressing needs – of which medics pay is one and are counselling patience. Already there has been a massive overhaul of referral hospitals around the country.

Our health system, while it has improved in recent years, is in a sorry state. Improving working conditions for the medical workers as a step to alleviate the situation has to be a priority. That being said, a doctor's strike is not like a taxi drivers' or shopkeepers' or even prosecutors' strike. The risk of loss of life is real and ever present without medical attention.

Already expectant mothers, accident victims and other critically ill people are holding their breaths for the doctors to return to work.

It is safe to say the striking medics have made their point. The Government cannot afford to have not seen it.

A return to work will not constitute a defeat for the doctors. They can still negotiate as they provide much needed services to the population.

Doctors please get back to work!

New Vision

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