



PRESS STATEMENT

STRIKES BY HEALTH PROFESSIONALS COST LIVES: GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO PERMANENTLY ADDRESS THIS

Released on May 11th, 2023

Kampala - Specialists in public health facilities have, effective 11:00pm, of 9th May, 2023 laid down their tools over salary and title disputes with government. The specialists including gynaecologists, paediatricians, surgeons and emergency physicians also supervise senior house officers. This comes after Senior House Officers went on strike over the failure by government to pay their allowances. On 1st May, 2023 the Senior House Officers and Fellows resolved to reactivate their suspended industrial action on account of non-payment of salary arrears. This follows an earlier strike which was called on 20th of February, 2023. The Senior House officers called off the strike to allow for a negotiated settlement with government. The Industrial action specialists comes on the backdrop of protests by pre-medical interns, who according to Uganda Medical Association have also been waiting for deployment to health facilities for 9 months. The strike also comes at the end of the one-week long twitter #Ugandahealthexhibition that unfolded the "poor" health system the country has.

In our public health facilities, Interns and Senior House officers are first responders to emergencies and are responsible for most of the emergency obstetric care in regional and referral hospitals. The inability or unwillingness of government to timely and permanently resolve the labour disputes with health workers means a reversal in the gains made including the reduction in Maternal Mortality rates in public health facilities.

"It is important to note that the country continues to grapple with the challenge of Human Resources for health. The National Human Resource for Health audit report 2021/22 revealed that the available human resources for health cannot adequately cater for the health needs of Ugandans. The audit showed a major shortage of high-level cadre including specialists, consultants and senior consultants." **Peter Eceru, Advocacy coordinator, CEHURD**

"The strike by Specialists, Senior House Officers (SHOs) and the non-deployment of medical interns will have catastrophic consequences on the ability of Health Facilities to deliver health services to the vulnerable poor. The SHOs for example provide about 63% of the labour in regional and referral hospitals and provide support supervision to medical interns who handle emergencies. Their absence from facilities means that service provision will be curtailed." **Nakibuuka Noor Musisi, Deputy Executive Director- Programmes- CEHURD**

To respond to the need for the additional specialists, consultants and senior consultants, it is in the interest of government to put in place policy options that encourage/motivate especially in service medical doctors to upgrade into specialists

"We are concerned about the government slow response on the issues raised by the health service providers. Their strike affects the already fragile health delivery system

and we need to pay attention to it." **Fatia Kiyange , Executive Director-CEHURD**

The inability to manage and resolve these conflicts is costing lives and the longer it takes, the more lives that we will lose. These strikes disproportionately affect the poor and perpetuate health inequity. They are a clear indicator that the government is failing on its obligations to protect its citizens from violation of their rights. It also means that government has abdicated its responsibility of guaranteeing the right to life and health of its citizens. We want to remind the government that it owes the citizens a lot, having signed a social contract by virtual of holding power. Its absurd that we will continue to loose lives if no action is taken. The labour disputes in the health sub programme are largely occasioned by budgetary constraints. We therefore, implore Parliament to strongly take on the appropriation and oversight functions to have labour disputes in the health sector resolved once and for all. This involves appropriating resources to cater for funding gaps for recruitment of staff in public health facilities, ensuring timely release of their allowances, providing budgets for a better working environment among others.

We call on government through the Ministry of Health to review the current internship policy to find a viable and yet sustainable approach to internship. A viable and long-lasting policy option should be able to do away with regular strikes by interns who are a critical part of our health service delivery.

PRESS STATEMENT

PRESS STATEMENT