

MPs warn govt against tax waivers

Ismail Musa Ladu
Parliament

Members of Parliament – on Monday – warned the government against recommending and pushing for tax waivers.

The Parliamentarians argue that the process can be manipulated by government officials at the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Reagan Okumu, the chairman of the Parliamentary State Enterprises committee, said there are chances that the list of those to benefit from the waivers can be manipulated and stuffed with what he referred to as “ghost waivers”.

“Top government officials get compromised and start a tax waiver arrangement somewhere at a Kampala club to benefit a few people who are actually able to pay the taxes,” Mr Okumu said.

“There are too many waivers and unless we put our foot down, there are people who will always manipulate the process,” Mr Okumu said.

Last year in September, Parliament revised and approved government tax measures with a blanket tax

waiver, which is a document issued by the state specifically stating that the tax department consents to the transfer of the stock being presented for transfer, to taxpayers in the country covering all the outstanding debts accrued before 2002.

In the same year, Parliament passed the Finance Bill-2008, which purposed – among other things – to grant tax waivers of about Shs66.7 billion in outstanding tax arrears, interest and penalties accumulated since June 2002.

“The proposal is important for improved tax administration and management as these tax arrears date back more than seven years and are evidently not performing,” Mr Gaudioso Kabondo, the chairperson of the Finance Committee of Parliament, said adding that the waiver will help with compliance and encourage taxpayers to clean up their books.”

The Ministry of Finance, argued that most of the taxes cannot be recovered either because the taxpayers cannot be found or supporting documents were missing.

Appearing before the committee to discuss and respond to queries relating to revenue collection, Ms Allen Kagina, the Uganda Revenue Authority boss, said it only advises the Ministry of Finance to waive taxes after exhausting all collection options and they are rendered futile.

Recently, at a workshop organised by URA to educate legislators on taxation matters, Ms Kagina said she does not approve of tax waivers because it discourages compliance. She described discouraging tax compliance as one of the serious challenges the institution is facing at the moment.

MP John Drazu Arumadri, a member of the committee, told Ms Kagina to watch companies and individuals benefiting from the list of tax waivers and expose them.

Briefly

In April, URA wanted the Parliament to approve a blanket tax waiver of over Sh150b to taxpayers in the country covering all the outstanding debts accrued before 2002.

Daily Monitor, Dstv reward Scoreline winners



Multi Choice Uganda Marketing Manager Richard Sebahiiima Senkwale (L) rewards one of the winners in the on-going Score and Win promotion, Mr Richard Kugonza, at the Monitor Publications Headquarters last week. Looking on is Daily Monitor's Sports Editor Mark Namanya (C) and Daily Monitor's Marketing Manager Brian Mukisa (R). For one to participate in the promotion, sponsored by *Daily Monitor* and Dstv, all they need to do is to buy a copy of *Daily Monitor* - Monday, spot the sports personality in the Scoreline magazine and send in entries. The winners are contacted for prize winning. PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

Cheap internet unveiled

Walter Wafala
Kampala

Ugandans now have the opportunity to access cheap internet connection following the introduction of Moonlight, a new internet package by Uganda Telecom.

For a service fee of Shs60,000 per month, a Uganda Tel-

ecom customer with a fixed landline, can now be able to access internet services. The same user can use the service to make calls to UTL customers at Shs50 per minute.

The package will only be accessible between 7p.m to 7a.m during the weekdays and throughout day and night, over weekends.

Mr Hans Paulsen, Uganda Telecom's chief commercial officer, told journalists at a press briefing recently that the new offer is a response to customer demand for affordable internet.

Customers will have to buy a network modem worth Shs70,000, to have access to the service, for the start.



UGANDA VICTIM'S FOUNDATION

C/o Africa Youth Initiative Network, P.O.Box 981 Lira, Plot 12, Otim Tom road, Junior Quarters

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT AND LINE MINISTERS ON THE NEED FOR REPARATIONS FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Date 21th April 2009

Your Excellency Mr. President,

And Hon. Ministers of your Administration,

As you will recall, the conflict in northern Uganda has created an unprecedented victim society from the over 20year war and the 'waters' of the severe conflict and those of the Juba peace process have long flowed under the bridge. BUT, the victims of the conflict a majority of whom are still alive and are spread out in northern Uganda and in other urban areas of the Country live on in the most dejected and forgotten manner.

Upon the conclusion of the protocol on accountability and reconciliation of the Juba agenda peace items, we noted then and we note today that the victims of crime in northern Uganda i.e. the elderly men and women without family members to their aid; the child headed families; the numerous children born in captivity; women victims of rape and sexual related violence; the inhumanly disfigured and maimed persons; the numerous persons living with fragments and shrapnel rooted in their bodies; the persons living with septic and chronic wounds for years etc number in their hundreds and probably thousands.

These Ugandans who notwithstanding the poverty and hardship they lived in prior to the conflict, and the suffering they continue to experience given the after-effects of their victimization. were empowered and enjoyed humanity. The protocol on accountability and reconciliation gave them hope.

Mr. President, our member organizations have implemented some projects recently for a number of victims who were fortunate to get the opportunity to receive plastic and correctional surgery for deformed and maimed individuals and surgery to extract shrapnel and other explosive remains from their bodies. Yet, the numbers of those who were reached but who could not get into the programme (for lack of resources) is saddening. These victims shed painful tears while pleading to be included but they continue to suffer while the government provides no help. Of course there are those that have not been reached at all for the moment by our members and these are not any better!

The sovereignty of the State is highly appreciated but we associate ourselves greatly and we call upon you and your government to be guided by the United Nations **Basic Principles on the Rights to a Remedy and Reparations for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law**, which among others require that victims such as the Ugandans in northern Uganda be provided with effective and adequate repara-

tions. Reparations in this case may take various forms as outlined in the said principles but importantly, there must be a systematic reparations programme that will provide Restitution, Compensation, Rehabilitation, Satisfaction including truth telling, Guarantees for non repetition etc.

We sadly note that nothing of this nature has been undertaken to re-empower the victims and/or survivors of the atrocious conflict in northern Uganda. We have seen and the victims have seen that in the Amnesty process set in place by your administration and conducted through the Amnesty Commission, all those reporters who renounce rebellion, upon being granted amnesty, receive some support usually in the form of a mattress, blankets, basins, saucepans etc and they return to their communities somewhat empowered to start a new life while the victims of their actions have not been assisted in any way whatsoever.

Mr. President, we are not ignorant of the government's NORTHERN UGANDA SOCIAL ACTION FUND (NUSAF) and or the PEACE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PRDP). These government initiatives were and are planned under strategic objectives as part of the post conflict reconstruction and development programmes and do not inherently constitute a complete and effective planned Reparations Programme for victims.

We have painfully discovered that the government has since 2001 been paying out large sums of money in the name of compensation and reparations. These payments are an insult to the victims' communities in northern Uganda as they were effectuated without informed and wide spread consultations, assessments and no survey was done to establish the nature and extent of victimization.

We therefore recommend;

- 1) A special victims fund should be set up from which resources for reparations may be drawn and the government of Uganda should take the lead role in mobilizing resources for the fund.
- 2) Any Reparations by government for the benefit of victims in the conflict areas of Northern Uganda should be managed through a national reparation commission comprised of persons of high moral character and integrity representing the government, the international community, religious leaders, victims' groups representatives and civil society organizations.
- 3) Urgent medical, psychological and other attention should be attended to as soon as possible to preserve life through networking with victims organizations such as ours to provide information considering we have undertaken some of these

- 4) activities at the most minimal scale.
- 4) Government should support Cultural and traditional leaders to take measures to identify, provide assistance and protection to children born in captivity and ensure that they have a sense of belonging and identity.
- 5) A deliberate government programme to de-mine the war affected areas of northern Uganda if in existence should be strengthened so as to facilitate the safety and return of IDPs from the camps to their homes.
- 6) Government should promote and implement adult literacy programs, vocational and quality universal primary and secondary education for victims and victim communities including the rehabilitation of essential infrastructure like roads, schools and hospitals.
- 7) The newly formed Special Division of the High Court for war crimes should be facilitated to ensure proper running and that punishments for any individual convicted of serious crimes and human rights violations during the course of the conflict should reflect the gravity of the offence without distinction between state actors and non state actors for victims to receive justice.
- 8) Provision should be made for victims to have easy access to justice and aided to have a legal representative/s to facilitate consultations and legal advice on issues relating to their rights during and in the course of the peace process.
- 9) Measures be put in place to increase access to justice for PWD's by government and civil society such as constructing more PWD friendly infrastructure including availing sign language expertise and sensitizing PWD's about their rights as victims.
- 10) In the process of resettlement, Victims should be provided with standard basic start up requirements including farm equipments and basic needs provided through transparent government programmes.

Mr. President the Uganda Victims Foundation is a membership organization of NGO's and CBO's in northern Uganda that work with victims of serious crime perpetrated in their communities. It was established to raise a voice for the victims and to advocate for pro-victim solutions. We hope that you will listen to the voice of the victims expressed in this letter, and take practical steps to heal their wounds.

Signed
Chairman