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# Govt, public varsities disagree over strike

**KAMPALA.** The Education ministry has accused staff at public universities of being unpatriotic for insisting on a sit down strike even after government released Shs29.5b to enhance their salaries.

Mr Aggrey Kibenge, the under-secretary at the ministry, said on Thursday that the decision to continue with the strike is unfortunate and unpatriotic.

He said in a statement that the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Sports, on January 9 approved the "proposed allocation, schedule of Shs29.5b for salary enhancement in Financial Year 2018/19 and Shs4.3b as arrears for non teaching staff.

## Be patriotic

"The concerned staff ought to have some faith in the university

accounting officers who provided the details regarding the number of beneficiaries and actual amounts due to each since these formed the basis for computations that were verified by the ministries of Public Service and that of Education and Sports," the ministry statement reads in part.

Mr Kibenge requested the staff to abandon the strike and report to work.

Responding to Mr Kibenge's request, Mr Jackson Betihamah, the chairperson of Public Universities Non-teaching Staff Executive Forum, said the negotiations over the salary enhancement and arrears were done separately and therefore the ministry cannot change the position now.

"These issues were handled separately and the government is wrong

to think that they can change that now. We shall only call off the strike when they release the money for the arrears,' Mr Betihamah said.

## Fresh controversies emerge

Meanwhile, fresh controversies have emerged over the salary enhancement deal with the striking staff now demanding more money for the new universities that started after the salary enhancement negotiations. The new universities are Muni, Lira, Kabale and Soroti.

According to the sources privy to the negotiations, government was supposed to release annually Shs78.6b starting from 2015.

However, since then, the figures have been reducing, yet more universities came on board.

Mr Charles Kakuru, the chairperson of Mbarara University Work-

ers' Union, said government should have allocated more funds for the new universities.

"My biggest concern here is some new universities that have come up which were not included on the list when this money was allocated, these should not benefit from this," Mr Kakuru said.

Mr Kakuru, however, said they will obey the decisions of the general assemblies to strike.

"We shall not call off the strike until we get what we had asked from the government," he said.

Mr Betihamah said when the new universities came up, they raised the issue to the ministries and they promised to address the matter.

"We raised the concerns and the government officials promised us that they would provide more funds to accommodate the new universi-

ties. We are now surprised that they have all squeezed the universities in and we are sharing the same money," he said.

Finance minister Matia Kasaija admitted that at the time the negotiations took place, Muni, Lira, Kabale and Soroti universities had not started operations and the funds were meant for the existing universities.

"It is true the new universities were not part of the original negotiations. We have taken up their concerns and are looking into the proposals. We shall communicate to them at an appropriate time," Mr Kasaija said.

## Muni University opts out of strike

Muni University has, however, opted out of the strike. Sources at the university that spoke on condition of anonymity, said the university is not part of the striking team and want to engage in dialogue to address their issues.