

Govt apologises for army brutality in Makerere

By Nicholas Wassajja

The defence minister, Adolf Mwesige, has said the military excesses in quelling a tuition-driven demonstration at Makerere University are regrettable, affirming that any errors omitted by individual officers will be punished to deter reoccurrence.

"The Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) leadership from its intelligence came to learn of errors by some individual members of the force who could have acted out of the rules of engagement. Consequently, we withdrew the Military Police elements that were deployed and arrested the commander who was in charge," Mwesige said.

He made the remarks yesterday while meeting the committee on education that is investigating causes of student unrest at Makerere University.

Mwesige said a board of inquiry has been put in place to establish the facts pertaining to the conduct of the troops.

He, however, said: "No person has reported a specific case of sexual assault by a member of the UPDF, but should we receive such



Mwesige

complaints, it will be investigated and action taken. The investigation is now in advanced stage and will guide the next course of action to be taken against those found culpable.

Last month, unrest broke out at Makerere over a decision by management to increase tuition fees by 15%.

The demonstrations that started with a handful of girls attempting to stage a procession to deliver a petition to Parliament, turned violent when security forces used teargas and arrests the students.

The State Minister for Internal Affairs, Obiga Kania, called upon students with information relating

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to claims of sexual assault to report to the Police for investigations.

Kasese Woman MP Winnie Kiiza said the Government should undertake a deeper investigation into the sexual assault matter other than generic calls.

In company of the Deputy Chief of the Defence Forces, Lt Gen, Wilson Mbadi and the defence spokesperson, Brig. Richard Karemire, Mwesige also said whereas the army was playing a supportive role to the Police, when the demonstrations broke out, Military Police was already present at Makerere University.

"In the wake of incidents of armed robbery, murders and kidnaps in Kampala Metropolitan Area last year, UPDF in support of Police made strategic deployments in multiple areas, including Makerere University, which was a staging area for the anti-crime operations in neighbouring arrears because Police stations where they could base had limited space and facilities," he said.

Mbadi said following President Yoweri Museveni's directive for the army to withdraw its platoons from the University, "We are working with the Police to ensure there is no security vacuum left, otherwise we are withdrawing systematically."

Earlier, MPs had engaged Makerere University management and accused the vice-chancellor, Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe of using threats and high hardness in dealing with student affairs and being aloof to pressing concerns.

In response, Nawangwe refuted allegations of high hardness saying: "I do not think there is a vice-chancellor that has been open to students like me. The guild president has openly confessed that I meet him once every week for engagement."