



UDN Statement on the Purchase of over 20 Cars worth Shs. 200m each for Cabinet Ministers

We the members of Uganda Debt Network wish to express our deep concern at the persistent tendency for Government to ignore public opinion as manifested by the latest purchase of over 20 vehicles for Cabinet Ministers worth Shs. 200 million each – as reported in the *Daily Monitor* newspaper dated July 27, 2009. The purchase of the Land Cruisers for Cabinet Ministers shows lack of patriotism to the people of Uganda whom they represent.

Uganda Debt Network has in the past castigated Government about the heavy cost to the taxpayer of maintaining a bloated Public Administration (Ministers, Presidential advisors, Resident and Deputy/Assistant District Commissioners, District Chairpersons and numerous heads of parastatals and Members of Parliament). In the FY 2009/10, government has gone ahead to appoint 80 deputy RDCs in charge of Youth in addition to the already big numbers of Public servants. It is the expenditure on their remuneration and other officially endorsed privileges, which cause Government to have a hefty allocation to Public Administration in the Annual Budgets.

In the FY 2009/10, the Public Administration and Public Sector Management was allocated Shs. 750.89 billion which is 11.9% of the national budget, that is about four times of the allocation to the Agriculture budget (4.4%), and yet 73.3% of Ugandans are employed in this sector. This is further made worse with the current social problems facing the country such as the drought and famine afflicting the people in North Eastern and West Nile and other scattered parts of Uganda that has affected over 3 million people and claimed the lives of over 35 people. The cries of the starving nationals with emaciated bodies have been all too evident and vivid on the screens of our television sets

and in the print media while Government betrayed incredible lack of readiness to respond to such national emergencies.

Uganda's Debt Burden

Uganda's external debt has been increasing tremendously only over a period of three years from 2005 when Uganda had this debt reduced from \$4.464 billion to \$1.468 billion as a result of the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative by the Group of 8 rich nations through the multilateral agencies – the World Bank and International Monetary Fund - to the current US \$4 billion in 2009. This includes US\$ 1.9 billion disbursed and US \$1.6 billion currently contracted and yet to be disbursed. The odious debt is just exerting too much pressure on our rate of development and expenditure for essential services for poverty-reducing sectors such as agriculture which would reduce on the number of people starving to death in the country.

UDN is concerned that Parliament should continue playing the over sight role to check the irresponsible accumulation of the public debt which is overburdening the taxpayers

Uganda's Poverty Indicators

Uganda's poverty indicators present a miserable picture of an impoverished nation that cannot afford a decent living and survival for its population. In a country where 31% of the total population live below the poverty line, under-five mortality rate is per 136 per 1, 000, rural water supply 54.4%, literacy rates for both gender (adult females 57.7%) and (males is 76.8%) respectively, maternal mortality ratio 880 per 100,000 live births, birth attended by skilled health staff 39%.

The above startling figures indicate that our leaders owe a lot to their impoverished people. We expect them to provide a mechanism for linking the perspectives of poverty and addressing the needs of the poor to the policy formulation processes. There is growing evidence that the poor have received limited benefits from Uganda's macro-economic growth and stability.

Procurement

The Government has continued to undermine the procedure of procurement in this country. Institutions like the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) are established but the procurement processes have continued to be flouted. According to the PPDA Act, the procurement of any goods and services above shs. 70

million is supposed to be advertised and open bidding carried out, but unfortunately, as revealed to the press by the Authority's Executive Director, Mr. Edgar Agaba, this agency was not aware of any such advertising or open bidding having been carried out. To make matter worse, the current purchases clearly contravene the Public Service Standing Instructions on Standardization of Vehicles for Government Officials of 2003, yet no official information was forthcoming from the Ministry of Public Service who are the enforces of Government Standing Orders and Regulations and indeed issued the 2003 instruction.

UDN is of the strong view that there is lack of transparency purposely engineered to create loopholes to flout official procurement procedures and ultimately misuse public funds. In spite of Uganda having enacted the Access to Information Act in 2005 and subsequently gazetting regulations to operationalize it, Government continues to guard information related to such purchases as if they are National Security secrets. This means that some measure of secrecy surrounded this procurement which also went contrary to established legal provisions. It is UDN's strong contention that such flouting of laws and secretive handling of public processes is highly suspicious for being a strong recipe for the perpetration of corruption, misuse and wastage of public funds.

Recommendations

In view of worrying trend in the way Government implements its contract with the people, and the constitutional obligation that rests on its shoulders to observe and promote all the fundamental rights of its citizens, Uganda Debt Network makes the following recommendations:

1. The growing culture of wastage of public resources should be halted and government should save the resources mobilized from the donors and taxpayers and use them to improve the livelihoods of the vulnerable and especially those in the famine-stricken areas.
2. The public has entrusted the responsibility of discussing development proposals with the leaders of this country and in particular our Ministers who are also our

legislators. They are obliged to serve the interests of their people not their own selfish interests.

3. UDN calls upon the rest of Civil Society and the wider Ugandan public to protest in the strongest terms about the insensitive manner in which Government continues to handle serious national matters; and to send the message that the people reserve the right to exercise their constitutional rights to ensure that they are governed by a responsible government
4. Parliament should strengthen its constitutional role and responsibility of unmitigated oversight of all the Government's policy formulation and implementation processes as part of its exercise of its mandate as entrusted upon it by the Ugandan electorate and its bounden duty to protect the citizens' supreme public interests.
5. UDN calls upon Government to be fully conscious of its obligation to respect and uphold the Uganda Constitution 1995/2005 and related enabling laws, together with the international covenants and conventions that Uganda signed to protect the fundamental rights of all Ugandans. In this regard, however small the national cake is, all Ugandans have a right to access it equitably, and responsible government should not indulge in lavish expenditure of limited national resources for the self-aggrandisement of a small minority, however highly-placed, when other citizens are starving to death.

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