

STATEMENT BY THE VICE PRESIDENT ON THE INDUSTRIAL ACTION BY UNATU

It has been brought to my attention through the Press Release dated 11th June 2022, issued by the General Secretary of Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU), that UNATU called for industrial action by all the members of the Union with effect from 15th June 2022. The grounds of the industrial action cited in the Press Release include discriminatory salary enhancement and failure by Government to honour the Collective Bargaining Agreement signed in 2018.

The Government wishes to reiterate its commitment to provide salary enhancement for all Public Officers. This is evidenced by the phased salary enhancement that has so far been achieved over the years, whose implementation will continue within the available resources. In the last two years, Government has had to put aside other priorities to fund the fight against Covid 19. The priority of Government during this time was addressing Covid 19. That notwithstanding, while the private sector either laid off some workers and in some cases cut the pay during the last two years of Covid 19, the Government dutifully paid Teachers' and all its other public officers' salaries for the entire period of the closure of schools and when most of the other public officers were either working from home or not working at all due to Covid 19.

The current enhancement of the salaries for the scientists in the government system including science teachers was informed by the available resources, the numbers of scientists (out of 320,000 public officers, only 61,000 are scientists including science teachers). The impact that can be made by the scientists to the

development of the country benefits all of us. We have no doubt that you agree that we need an educated work force in all aspects of life but more so, in the sciences. Therefore, the enhancement of sciences, in our view, will attract and retain the crucial skill that is required by the country at this material time. The money used to pay salaries comes from taxes government collects. Scientists play a crucial role in the development of the private sector, hence, their being singled out to start with. This is not to mean that the government has forgotten the other categories of public officers.

All the categories of public officers including arts teachers will be taken care of subject to availability of resources in the coming years.

Therefore, this financial year, government among others, focused on putting money in the Parish Development Model so as to bring into the money economy all the 3.5 million households (about 15 million people) who are still in the subsistence economy. I wish to persuade all of us to support government in reaching out to all people in villages to join the money economy through PDM.

When those in subsistence economy are brought in the money economy and earn from the sale of their products, they will end up spending on consumption, thus, promote industrialization by the factories selling more goods. This will create more jobs and more revenue for the government. It's this revenue from where government will pay better salaries to all the other categories of public servants. So, by choosing to put money in the PDM and other programs like Emyooga, micro finance, the funds for SMEs, the money under UDB, we are deliberately and directly investing in the private sector from which government will collect

revenue in the long run. With increased revenue collection we will pay public servants better including arts teachers.

This Government position has on several occasions been communicated to teachers in the various meetings we have held. In the meeting with H. E. the President with the leadership of UNATU on Saturday 18th June 2022 he informed UNATU leaders of Government's commitment to work towards enhancing the pay for all public officers. He also took them through the history of Uganda where the British developed an enclave economy of the 3Cs (copper, cotton and coffee) and the 3Ts (tea, tobacco and tourism). During the Amin regime, even the enclave economy collapsed. So when NRM came to power in 1986, NRM had to embark on rescue, recovery, growth and transformation of the economy. We have been able to invest in the roads e.g. one can move from Kisoro to Moroto and from Kisoro to Koboko on tarmac. We still have more to do though. On electricity, we now have more electricity than we are currently consuming. As a way of increasing electricity consumption, we are attracting more investors to consume the electricity and at the same time extending electricity to all the sub counties of Uganda. With our zeal in prioritizing roads, electricity, scientists, PDM, and other social economic programs, the economy of Uganda will grow much faster. We cannot do this and at the same time increase the salaries of all public officers due to the limited resource envelope.

The Government of Uganda does not agree with the position that has been proposed by UNATU that the enhancement should be for all or no enhancement at all. The decision we took to single out all scientists in government was the right decision in view of the limited resources. Our children have suffered as a result

of being out of school for the two years of Covid 19. The teachers are doing a disservice to the country by halting the learning and teaching in government schools moreover the private schools where the teachers get lesser pay than those in government schools are teaching.

Government has also noted with concern that UNATU membership has closed the schools. My thinking is that no teacher, whether on strike or not, has the legal right or justification to close a public school without the concurrence of the Government of Uganda, because we work as partners.

While the Government is committed to better the salaries of public servants, the demands for a salary enhancement, however cannot be addressed in the financial year 2022/23 and government has been very clear to teachers on this position. Teachers are therefore called upon to appreciate and understand the position of Government.

With that in mind, the purpose of this communication is to inform all the teachers and members of the public that Government has not issued any directive for closure of any school and therefore any contrary instructions to learners should not arise. All schools are expected to proceed with the Ministry of Education and Sports school calendar for the 2nd Term 2022.

I would like to request all teachers to return to their normal duties and understand that Government values them and the service they are rendering to the country, as guided by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Service in her letter Ref. ADM/218/264/01 of 22nd June, 2022.

Let me also remind the teachers that industrial action should never be an option because for example in this case the most affected persons are the learners and the parents. Please let us consider the plight of learners and parents.

We have learnt that some teachers who are willing to continue with the noble duty of educating our learners are being harassed and intimidated by a section which is bent on continuing to disrupt teaching and learning in schools.

Government remains available to engage with all well-meaning Ugandans including teachers with the view to making their living conditions better. Let us work together as a team for the good of our country.

Maj (Rtd) Jessica Alupo R. E. (MP)
VICE PRESIDENT