

# STARLINK ACCEPTS REQUEST TO BLOCK **ILLEGAL** USERS

By Charles Etukuri

US tech giant Starlink has accepted Uganda's request to restrict their devices in the country.

Ben Macwilliam, the director of Starlink Market Access, Space Exploration Technologies Corp, in a January 2 letter to Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) executive director Nyombi Thembo, admitted that people have been illegally using its internet services in Uganda. Currently, its Ugandan subsidiary, Star Link Global Internet Services Uganda, has not yet been licensed to operate.

"I am in receipt of the UCC letter dated January 1, 2026, (Ref: LA/350) to Star Link Global Internet Services Uganda Ltd (Starlink Uganda) concerning the illegal use of satellite internet services by individuals in Uganda. To be clear, Starlink Uganda itself is not selling or marketing satellite internet services in Uganda because it is not yet licensed by UCC. Because of your letter, however, we are aware that satellite services provided by affiliates of Starlink Uganda, are being used illegally in the country. Please be advised that we have taken action to rapidly and



**Nyombi Thembo**

decisively respond to the concerns raised by the UCC," Macwilliam stated.

## ILLGAL USERS IN UGANDA BLOCKED

In the letter, he revealed that on January 1, Starlink implemented a new service restriction tool for Uganda, adding that as of January 1, 2026, there are no Starlink terminals operating in the country.

Starlink stated that the individuals who were using Starlink terminals in Uganda prior to January 1, had purchased and activated the terminals in countries where Starlink is live and



**Col. Chris Magezi**

## BETWEEN THE LINES

UPDF spokesperson says that Starlink gadgets clearance has nothing to do with the alleged Internet restrictions ahead of the 2026 general election.

authorised.

"Any Starlink usage in Uganda was without our approval or consent and in violation of our terms of service. Starlink Uganda has never imported or distributed terminals in Uganda.

We reiterate that there are no

Starlink terminals operating in Uganda as of January 1, 2026," the letter noted. Starlink said they were committed to co-operating with UCC's regulatory requirements.

"We appreciate your partnership and look forward to Starlink's future in Uganda. Our teams remain entirely at your disposal for any clarifications required," Macwilliam stated.

## WHERE IT STARTED

The development follows a Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) memo, restricting the importation of Starlink technology gadgets without clearance from the UPDF Chief of Defence Forces (CDF).

URA commissioner of customs, Asadu Kigozi, in a letter to all customs staff dated December 19 said the restriction takes effect immediately and all staff are expected to adhere to it.

## UPDF SECURITY CLEARANCE

Acting army spokesperson Col. Chris Magezi defended the decision.

"CDF is the head of security and chairperson of the inter-agency security committee. Anything that needs security will ordinarily have to be cleared by him," Magezi said.

He explained that the decision has nothing to do with alleged Internet restrictions ahead of the 2026 general election.

## UCC STAND

UCC director of corporate affairs Fred Otunnu said they are not officially aware of people using Starlink in Uganda. Starlink Mini is a compact, portable kit that can easily fit in a backpack, designed to provide high-speed, low-latency internet on the go. It includes a built-in WiFi router, lower power consumption, DC power input, and max download speeds over 100 megabits per second.

## HOW IT WORKS

Starlink uses a massive constellation of small satellites in low earth orbit to provide high-speed internet. As of mid-2025, Starlink was operating in over 19 African nations, but not yet officially in Uganda.

In April this year, UCC boss Thembo confirmed they had held an engagement with Starlink, who were applying for a licence to offer satellite internet in Uganda. This was after representatives of Starlink met President Yoweri Museveni signaling potential approval of the licence.