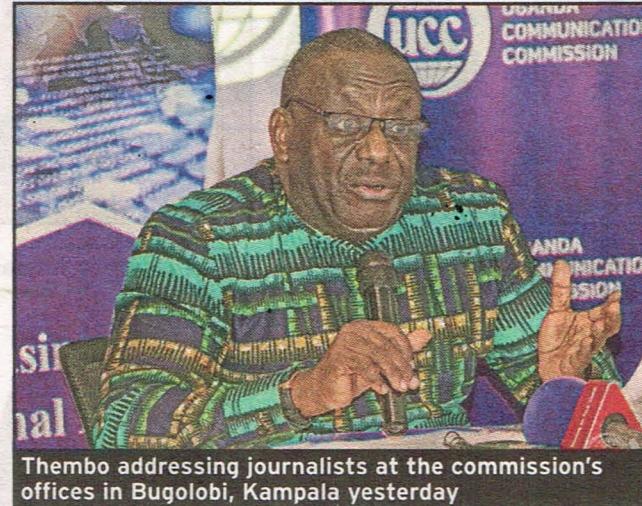


INTERNET BACK: UCC JUSTIFIES SHUTDOWN

By Sarah Nabakooza

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has defended the temporary suspension of internet access to the public during the 2026 general elections.

Addressing journalists yesterday at the commission's offices in Bugolobi, Kampala, UCC executive director Nyombi Thembo said the decision was necessary, proportionate and guided by national security considerations. Thembo announced the restoration of public internet access across the country, effective January 18. This follows the conclusion of elections and a security assessment by the Inter-agency Security Committee which Thembo said was carried out in line with international principles of proportionality and legitimate aim.



Thembo addressing journalists at the commission's offices in Bugolobi, Kampala yesterday

-agency Security Committee, UCC directed the immediate restoration of public internet access," he said.

SHUTDOWN EXPLAINED

Nyombi explained that the brief shutdown was implemented on recommendation of the Inter-agency Security Committee to prevent the spread of

misinformation, disinformation and malformation, curb potential electoral fraud and avert incitement to violence during what he described as a highly sensitive national period.

"This measure was not taken lightly. It was aimed at ensuring that the electoral process proceeded peacefully and that the stability Ugandans have

worked hard to maintain was not undermined," Thembo said. As of midnight on January 17, public internet services were fully restored, including access to websites, news platforms, educational resources, government portals, financial services and email, he said.

However, Thembo said social media platforms and over-the-top (OTT) messaging applications remain temporarily restricted. He observed that the continued restriction of social media was intended to guard against misuse that could threaten public order, adding that the commission

would keep monitoring the situation and issue updates as circumstances evolve.

Thembo warned users against attempting to bypass restrictions using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), saying: "If you bypass these restrictions to break the law, do not be surprised if your device is blocked from the network," he said, cautioning that enforcement would target unlawful conduct, not ordinary communication.

ECONOMIC LOSSES

On the economic impact of the shutdown, Thembo acknowledged that internet

disruptions carry costs, but noted that UCC plans to commission a study to assess the losses associated with the suspension.

"All of us must understand the cost of putting the Internet down, the cost to the public, to government, to the private sector and to the regulator," he said, adding: "As a regulator, we have a strong interest in this and once the study is ready, we shall share it with all stakeholders, including the general public."

He noted that such disruptions could fall under *Force Majeure* clauses in contracts due to their unexpected nature, adding that insurance companies may in future consider election-related internet shutdowns as an insurable risk.

Thembo commended telecom operators and internet service providers for adhering to UCC directives, noting that a few cases described as non-compliance were largely technical and linked to the unprecedented nature of the directive.