

Uganda needs more firefighters, equipment

The deployment of a fire truck by the police to Kalangala, an island district prone to fire outbreaks, is a step in the right direction.

The district has over the years suffered repeated devastating fire outbreaks, displacing hundreds and destroying property worth millions of shillings.

According to the authorities, the fire outbreaks in Kalangala are caused by improper storage of petrol in wooden houses by residents.

They also blame the infernos on residents who leave cooking stoves and candles unattended in their homes, which are predominantly wooden. Previously, Kalangala residents were forced to wait helplessly for a fire truck to be ferried across Lake Victoria from faraway Masaka District on the mainland. In most cases, the fire truck arrived too late to save anything.

Unfortunately, the firefighting challenges that previously afflicted Kalangala are faced by many districts across the country.

The situation is dire, with very few fire trucks serving many districts. On many occasions, having travelled long distances, the firefighters arrive after infernos have gutted property.

They are then blamed by irate residents for shortcomings that are not of their own making. The problem is compounded by the fact that many urban areas, where fire outbreaks are likely to occur, do not have fire hydrants.

This shortage of fire hydrants makes it difficult for firefighters to conduct their noble duty.

Precious time is often wasted when fire trucks run out of water, and there are no fire hydrants nearby to refill them.

This compels firefighters to travel long distances to refill fire trucks while fire destroys property and endangers lives.

We call upon the government to procure more fire trucks, train more fire fighters and ensure that urban areas have fire hydrants.

Each district should have a fire station equipped with at least one fire truck.

The authorities should also compel proprietors of commercial buildings to equip them with fire extinguishers, smoke detectors and fire sprinklers.

All government offices, schools and hospitals must be equipped to fight fire. Employees and learners should be taught how to use fire extinguishers and also how to prevent fire outbreaks.

To ensure fire safety, the authorities should consider establishing stringent rules on the purchase and storage of highly flammable substances such as petrol and chemicals.

To the public, we say that fire safety is not only a duty of the authorities but a collective responsibility.

We should all do our part in preventing fire outbreaks to safeguard property and lives. Do not leave candles and charcoal stoves unattended. Do not place flammable materials near heat sources such as cooking stoves, and avoid illegal connections to electricity.

The issue:

Firefighting

Our view:

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