

MAK guild president narrates ordeal

By Cecilia Okoth and Sarah Mazirwe

When Julius Katerega, the Makerere University guild president, came out to speak to the media yesterday, he was crestfallen.

Visibly in pain and speaking in a low tone, Katerega said he does not know what happened to him.

Katerega had, until Saturday last week, 'gone missing' after students went on strike, protesting a 15% tuition increment, which applies to first-year students.

Accompanied by some of his guild ministers, he told journalists that on the eve of his alleged capture, he was dropped off by a colleague at Kikoni after an interview with one of the local television stations.

"I got onto a bodaboda from Kikoni to the university main gate, only to realise that there was heavy presence of Police at the entrance. I then resorted to using a secluded path and that is when I blacked out," he said.

"When I woke up, I was seated between two men who questioned why I was leading the demonstration and mobilising students against the position of the education ministry. The men then told me they did not want to see me around the university," he said.

Asked whether he was beaten, Katerega said he did not know what happened to him but only woke up with joint pains and a swollen back.

"When I went to hospital, the doctors run some blood samples and they discovered chloroform in my blood," he said.

The student leadership was initially meant to hold a meeting at the Makerere University Freedom Square yesterday to determine whether to call off their strike, which has paralysed business on campus for the last two weeks.

The Police, however, foiled their plans. Explaining the heavy deployment, Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson Patrick Onyango said: "We received information that the intended assembly was not going to be peaceful. We also learnt that other students were going to hijack the assembly and turn it into a demonstration."

Onyango said the Police instead escorted Katerega to Parliament, where he was scheduled to meet MPs on the education committee.

Meanwhile, the Police yesterday fired a number of teargas canisters at students and journalists who were moving around the university.

While the University Council announced a halt to the 15% increment on functional fees last week, students are insisting that the increment on tuition fees should also be halted altogether.

They also want suspended students to be unconditionally reinstated and the warning letters rescinded.

According to the guild, 26 students had received warning letters over the strike, while 11 have been suspended. Another statement posted on the university website indicates that nine students are on suspension.

They are Frank Bwambale, Siperia Saasiraabo, Rogers Mbajjo Ssebiraalo, Derrick Ojambo Wabwire and David Musiri. Others are Ivan Kyeyune, Seiz Mutatina, Job Dhabona and Simon Ssenoga.

Makerere University communications manager Dr Mohammad Kiggundu yesterday said various stakeholders including the Parliament, the Office of the President as well as the University Council, had come on board to find a solution.

"We, therefore, expect our good students to go back to the lecture theatres as they wait for the two weeks given to the education committee of Parliament to officially deliver its recommendations," Kiggundu said.