

DECISION FOLLOWED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SECURITY COMMITTEE

By Michael Odeng

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) yesterday ordered a temporary suspension of public internet access and selected mobile services across the country.

In a statement dated January 13, 2026, the UCC executive director Nyombi Thembo said the decision followed recommendations from the inter-agency security committee. This is not the first time UCC is shutting down the Internet during the election period.

He said the directive requires all licensed mobile network operators and internet service providers to temporarily suspend public internet access, the sale and registration of new SIM (subscriber identity module) cards and outbound data roaming services to one-network-area countries during the election period.

Thembo said that the measure is necessary to mitigate the rapid spread of online misinformation, disinformation, electoral fraud and related risks, as well as preventing incitement of violence that could affect public confidence and national security during the election period.

According to UCC, the suspension which started yesterday at 6:00pm, will remain in force, until a restoration notice is issued by it.

“Services will be restored only upon receipt of explicit written notice from UCC. A phased restoration plan will be submitted to all operators,” UCC executive director stated.

Thembo noted that during the election period, all non-essential public internet traffic must be blocked. Public internet traffic includes, but is not limited to social media platforms, web browsing, video streaming, personal email services and messaging applications.

He noted that the suspension applies to mobile broadband (cellular), fibre

GOVT SHUTS DOWN INTERNET AHEAD OF GENERAL ELECTIONS

optic, leased lines, fixed wireless access, microwave radio links and satellite internet services.

To safeguard public safety, Thembo said a critical national function and the operational integrity of communications infrastructure, a strictly defined exclusion list has been established by UCC.

According to UCC, these exclusions permit continued access to essential services and systems required for network monitoring and management and are strictly for non-mobile internet services.

“If operators detect abuse of internet services by excluded services and systems, immediate suspension is required,” Thembo stated.

He stressed that access to the excluded systems must be limited exclusively to authorised personnel and implemented through secure, white-listed mechanisms, such as dedicated IP (Internet Protocol) ranges, VPNs (Virtual private network), or private circuits.

SOCIAL MEDIA PROHIBITED

Thembo stated that access to social media and message applications is prohibited within the accessible service provider environments.

“Operators must submit to the UCC the white-listed systems and service accounts corresponding to



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the exclusion list immediately upon implementation of the directive,” he said.

Thembo said operators shall further ensure that mobile VPN services are disabled on their networks.

WARNING

He said operators that shall not implement the UCC instruction must shut down their entire internet infrastructure for the duration of the suspension, warning that non-compliance will attract severe sanctions.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The essential services and critical infrastructure excluded from public internet suspension are healthcare systems at national referral hospitals; financial services essential for public welfare, including core banking networks, interbank funds transfer and clearing systems, automated teller machine (ATM) networks, URA tax payment systems and government department and international payment systems.

Others include critical government administrative services including

immigration, Electoral Commission, secure portals, voter verification systems, result tabulation networks; utilities management including the power grid and payment systems, water supply control and payment and fuel distribution logistics.

Also, among the essential public services include transportation and aviation control systems including air traffic control and railway signalling; Sim swaps and Sim upgrade systems within existing regulations; network management and monitoring tools and regulatory security and cyber security systems.

GUIDANCE

UCC guided that telecom companies should verify that no public-facing services can bypass the suspension and maintain detailed logs of all traffic on excluded systems and make them available for UCC inspection upon request.

“Report any technical issues, suspected breaches, or compliance challenges to the UCC within 30 minutes,” Thembo stated.

He stated that UCC acknowledges the operational challenges the directive may impose and appreciates the telecom companies’ co-operation in upholding national stability during the election sensitive period.