

# Four Ebola patients discharged

Dr Diana Atwine expressed disappointment over international travel restrictions imposed on Uganda despite the robust and transparent Ebola response.

BY TONNY ABET

Uganda has discharged four Ebola patients who have recovered and 270 people who completed their 21-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health said yesterday as the country continues to manage an outbreak involving mostly imported cases.

Dr Diana Atwine, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, in a joint press briefing with the World Health Organisation (WHO) African Region and DR Congo yesterday, expressed disappointment over international travel restrictions imposed on Uganda despite what she described as the country's robust and transparent response.

"Uganda has so far registered 15 positive cases; the index case died. Four so far have been discharged as of this morning and for the contacts, we have so far discharged 270 who have com-

pleted 21 days under quarantine, out of the 620," Dr Atwine said.

She re-echoed Uganda's capacity to manage Ebola outbreaks and prevent spread to other countries. "Uganda has had nine Ebola outbreaks so far, but we have never exported any Ebola case outside our borders. We have the most effective contact tracing and management system. Our contacts are always quarantined and so we are sure they will not leave to spread the disease," she said.

Dr Atwine also announced that a no-fly restriction is being enforced at the airport and the port of entry, where the contact list is shared with all the people managing the travel industry, including Immigration and Foreign Affairs.

She was concerned that countries continue to restrict Ugandans from travelling out of the country over a disease, which she said is under control. "We



Medical team from the Alliance for International Medical Action, an international NGO, dress up in personal protective equipment in Rwampara, DR Congo. PHOTO/REUTERS

**Complaint.** This is unfair and we request the international community to take this information that our community is efficient, able and is tried and tested. We do register dissatisfaction as a country because of the way we have been treated," she added.

Dr Diana Atwine, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health.

feel that we, as a country, have been a victim of transparency; the more we communicate, the more we are blocked, the more we are locked out, the more our citizens are stopped from travel-

ling," she said. "For us, this is unfair and we request that the international community take this information that our community is efficient, is able, and is tried and we do register dissatisfaction as a country because of the way we have been treated," she added.

Prof Mohamed Yakub Janabi, the WHO African region director, appealed to countries to stop "blanket travel restrictions", saying Ebola Virus Disease is not an airborne disease like Covid-19. He explained that such restrictions have far-reaching consequences for economies and the well-being of people in affected countries.

Some countries have an-

nounced varying levels of travel restrictions for persons from Uganda and the DR Congo, a move which many Ugandans have linked to combining outbreak figures from Uganda and the DR Congo and reporting them as one.

The US, in its travel advisory for Uganda issued on May 17, placed Uganda at "Level 4 - Do not travel." "Do not travel to Uganda due to health, crime, terrorism, unrest, and laws targeting persons based on sexual orientation," information from the US State Department reads.

"The US government has limited ability to provide emergency consular services to US citizens in Uganda due to the Health sit-

uation," the US added, referring to the May 17 announcement by the WHO, where the Ebola outbreak in the DRC and Uganda was declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. On May 18, the US government also said: "In light of the ongoing Ebola outbreak, the Department is temporarily pausing all visa operations at US Embassy Kampala."

The government of Canada also issued a travel alert for Uganda on May 26. "Avoid non-essential travel to Uganda due to the outbreak of Ebola disease, the threat of terrorism, as well as high crime rates," information on the Canadian government's website reads.