

Mbarara varsity staff go on strike

Position. Among the demands, they want the vice chancellor, who is accused of mismanagement, to be retired with immediate effect.

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The academic and non-teaching staff at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (Must) on Thursday laid down tools, saying the university council had failed to address their concerns raised about a month ago.

On April 4, they wrote to the council accusing the vice chancellor, Prof Celestino Obua, of mismanagement and misconduct.

They accuse him of financial mismanagement, staff harassment and intimidation, suffocating operations of the grants office and disregarding policy on staff training and development.

Accusations

He is also accused of flouting university transport policy, not heeding council directives, influence peddling and flouting procurement and disposal guidelines, absence from duty and providing wrong information to the university council.



VC. Prof Celestino Obua

The staff had planned to lay down tools on April 18 but they decided to delay the industrial action to give council time to address the concerns.

On Thursday, 160 staff attended the emergency general assembly at Main Lecture Theatre and only four voted against holding a strike.

Total number

The university has 545 staff, according to Dr John Emenyu, the chairman of Mbarara University of Science Technology Academic Staff Association (Mustasa).

Of these, 229 are academic staff and 316 are non-teaching staff. It is not clear whether the 365 staff that did not attend the assembly are against or in support of the strike.

"Today, we have officially laid down our tools as workers. Our reasons are very sim-

ple; we have been with many issues and challenges which we forwarded to council and but we have not received any response yet. Early last month, we had general assembly and we had four resolutions. We gave them 14 days to act but they refused to act, we added them more 14 days, no answer. Today we effect resolution number five of laying down our tools until they adhere to our recommendations," Mr Julius Taremwa, the general secretary of Mustasa, said at the assembly.

The petition

In the April 4 petition, the staff gave the following recommendations: that the university council carries out a forensic audit and that the university secretary steps aside as investigations proceed for avoidance of interference. They also demanded an extraordinary joint meeting of university council members, senate, staff and student representatives be urgently convened to seek harmony, restore sanity and credibility of the institution.

Retiring the VC

The fourth recommendation was that Prof Obua should be retired in public interest immediately and the search committee be empowered to start the process of searching the next vice chancellor with immediate effect.

UNIVERSITY RESPONDS

The university council chairperson, Dr Ben Mbonye, said they will address the staff concerns after the audit and investigations.

"They raised certain issues to council; there is no item which we have not tackled. I told their chairperson, Dr Emenyu, that by end of May or first weeks of June, forensic audit will be completed and that is the report the appraisal team should use. We can't shorten that period because the forensic must be given enough time to be thorough," Dr Mbonye said on phone.

He said he was out of the country and would return next week.

The fifth recommendation read: "Basing on all the above, we hereby give notice of laying down our tools within 14 days, if the university council does not expeditiously address our demands."

Prof Obua earlier said he cannot comment on the allegations because they are being investigated. His five-year term expires in October.