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## **Change Makers**

### **Justinian Muhwezi Kateera on Export of Health Workers**

**Presenter:** Today we are joined by Justinian Muhwezi Kateera, the Executive Director of the Institute of Public Policy Research Uganda. Justinian, your organization recently filed a lawsuit against the Uganda government over the recruitment of over two hundred health workers to work in Trinidad and Tobago. Please give us some background information on this situation?

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** Yes, so government officials, specifically, decided to recruit over two hundred and eighty health workers from the public sector, and to transfer them to the service of the government of Trinidad and Tobago, ostensibly in order to strengthen the health sector of Trinidad. Now, from both a legal and policy perspective, we thought this was wrong. We need all of our doctors here, we need all of our nurses here. We have greater challenges than Trinidad does. Trinidad has ten times as many doctors and nurses as Uganda does, so why would we seek to strengthen Trinidad instead of strengthening our own?

We have districts, several districts which don't even have a single doctor. We have regional referral hospitals which are just understaffed. And the consequence of that is that we lose 100,000 children to malaria every year, we lose over 6,000 women to complications during childbirth, so it just doesn't make sense either from a legal, policy, or any other perspective.

So we brought this court case, and we argued that it's unconstitutional, it's illegal, it's irrational, it's unethical, and it's contrary to government policy for us to export health workers to a better resourced country.

**Presenter:** What do you hope to achieve with this court case, both inside and outside the courtroom?

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** So the court case is obviously not an end in itself. You know, you could get a judgment, but what does that actually mean? But the legal proceedings are supposed to be a catalyst for broader discussions around comprehensive health care reform. We need to tackle the issue of pay, of retaining medical workers, of training more medical workers. We need to prioritize certain interventions in primary healthcare. We need to do regional distribution of health workers, because eighty percent of health workers —

**Presenter:** — are in urban areas.

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** — are in urban areas. And so this is just a catalyst for the broader discussion about healthcare reform, and we hope to make proposals in this respect.

**Presenter:** Mr. Justinian, health workers have always fled the country for meaningful employment. Do you think this court case will stop that from happening?

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** Well first of all, let's draw a distinction between health workers leaving privately —

**Presenter:** Yeah.

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** — and those who are leaving because the government is actually sending them away.

**Presenter:** Okay.

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** So with respect to the second category, we think it's wrong for government to facilitate.

**Presenter:** Their leaving?

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** Their exodus, in order to strengthen the health sector of Trinidad, for example, as it is in this case.

**Presenter:** Yes.

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** So that's a goal we challenge. With respect to the migration of health workers, yes, they do migrate, and that is why we need to take special effort to retain health workers here. We just can't afford to lose all these lives time and time again. And we know there is a direct relation between the lack of health workers and mortality, especially maternal and child mortality. And so this is ... it's both a moral, political, legal, policy and priority for us to invest in our health sector, and to retain our doctors and nurses.

**Presenter:** How can people join you in your efforts?

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** So, we want to hear their stories, because I think everybody has an experience with the health sector.

**Presenter:** Yeah.

**Justinian Muhwezi Kateera:** And I think now is an opportunity for us to hear your story. Your story matters. I want us to all get involved with our political leaders to ask the right questions of them. There's a lot of work that should have been done by Parliament in passing legislation that would strengthen the health sector. So you need to appeal to your leaders.

But, you know, more than that, I think, we need to inspire, we need to believe that we can actually make a change, and it begins with you, at your level.

**Presenter:** Thank you, Mr. Justinian, for your time. And we hope your efforts assist in the improvement of the healthcare system in Uganda.