

Striking Kenyan doctors threaten to shut private hospitals

December 8 2016

Kenyan doctors and nurses warned Thursday they will extend a strike crippling public hospitals to private clinics as well next week, unless the government offers them more in a pay dispute.

Public hospitals have been deserted for four days, with patients left to fend for themselves, forced to return home or transfer to [private clinics](#) as [healthcare workers](#) embarked on a mass stayaway.

"It is very important for Kenyans to know that we don't hate going to work, we love our work but it has come to a situation where we need to tell the government that we are serious this time," nurse Eunice Ngare told AFP during a protest march.

Unions are demanding a 300-percent pay rise for doctors and 25- to 40-percent pay rise for nurses that they say was agreed in a 2013 collective bargaining agreement, but has yet to be implemented.

The government on Wednesday offered a 50,000 shilling (\$500, 442 euro) increase to the lowest paid doctors—effectively doubling their salaries—but unions rejected this outright and again walked out of talks.

"We want to make it very clear that this [strike](#) shall only be called off by the implementation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. The doctors in this country have been taken on a goose chase for so long," said Ouma Oluga of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union.

He said that from Tuesday next week "all hospitals will be closed, be it private or public."

A judge on Wednesday ordered union officials to appear in court next Tuesday, threatening them with jail for disobeying a court order to call off the strike.

Judge Helen Wasiliwa said that if they did not show up she would order their arrest.

The strike led to chaos outside hospitals earlier this week, with bystanders helping women give birth, and more than 100 patients escaping from Kenya's only psychiatric hospital in the capital Nairobi.

At least 14 patients are reported to have died in [public hospitals](#) due to lack of care, President Uhuru Kenyatta said Wednesday.

"We are ready to dialogue with our doctors and nurses. Let's be mindful of the lives of our people," he said.

However Kenyatta and his government have received short shrift on social media, where supporters of the strike question the loss of millions of dollars in the corruption-plagued country, while doctors battle to secure wage increases.

"It is appalling that Kenya cannot pay its [doctors](#) a decent salary, while billions are shamelessly stolen from the public coffers," said an editorial in the Daily Nation this week.

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