

Work permit fees for staff on floating hospitals waived

From PIUS RUGONZIBWA
in Mwanza

THE government has waived registration and work permit fees for medical experts coming to work as volunteers on medical ships that will soon start operating on Lake Victoria.

Deputy Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Dr Kebwe Stephen Kebwe, said here over the weekend that waiving fees totalling around 600 US dollars (about 1m/-) currently charged on each medical volunteer was an important move.

He said the decision was taken as more partners showed interest to bring in more medical ships to operate floating services for underserved and hard to reach islands on Africa's largest lake.

"We are grateful for the spirit shown by our friends in development who have contributed their resources to support us with these unique medical facilities. Waiving taxes for their experts is like acknowledging

their contributions to us," he said.

On Saturday, the first ship donated by a religious institution, World Mission Frontiers, was inaugurated and Dr Kebwe said another institution, the African Inland Church (AIC), had also arranged to ship in another floating hospital.

According to Dr Kebwe, the government was determined to improve health services and the decision to increase the sector's budget to the tune of 1.5tril/- this financial year, up from 700bn/- last year, demonstrated its commitment to that end.

He told the leaders from all Lake Zone regions who attended the ceremony that over 200bn/- would be allocated to their respective district councils this year and directed them to set aside special budgets for the medical ships.

He challenged operators of the ship to observe laws and regulations governing the provision of health services in the

country and not engage in illegal acts such as using the ship to conduct illegal fishing.

The event was also attended by Deputy Minister for Transport, Dr Charles Tizeba, who directed the Tanzania Ports Authority (TPA) to allow the ship to use the docks free of charge and arrange for construction of others.

It was also announced that two boats would be supplied and used as ambulances to transport patients from the medical ships to referral hospitals on the mainland.

"I am aware that Plan International has also agreed to support us with one small ship that will be used as an ambulance and we are indeed grateful," said Dr Tizeba.

Mwanza Regional Commissioner (RC), Mr Evarist Ndikilo, said provision of the medical ships was a clear sign of how Mwanza and the entire Lake Zone area was performing in rendering quality health services.