

UGANDA STRENGTHENS DISASTER PREPAREDNESS WITH COMMAND POST EXERCISE 'OKOA MAISHA 25'



Uganda has reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding lives through stronger disaster management mechanisms following the successful conclusion of the Command Post Exercise (CPX) *Okoa Maisha 25*, held at the Uganda Rapid Deployment Capability (URDC) Headquarters in Jinja.

The exercise, themed “Disaster Response and Management: Coordination Mechanisms Among Different Actors for Rapid Response Within 12 Hours,” emphasized Uganda’s growing recognition that disaster response requires a multisectoral approach involving government ministries, security forces, humanitarian organizations, and local governments.

Hon. Hillary Onek, Minister of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, officiated as Chief Guest and applauded participants for their dedication. He emphasized the need for continuous professionalism, compassion, and resolve, reminding stakeholders that disaster preparedness is a shared responsibility.

Hon. Gen. Katumba Wamala, Minister of Works and Transport, stressed the danger of working in silos, urging collective planning and sustained investment in disaster-response equipment.

Hon. Huda Oleru, Minister of State for Defence in charge of Veterans Affairs, said the exercise helped expose operational gaps and reinforced the urgency of cross-sectoral cooperation.

Brigadier Emmanuel Kanyesigye, Cantonment Commander Jinja, representing the UPDF Chief of Staff, reaffirmed the army’s readiness to support

community-based disaster frameworks and ensure security in emergency environments.

Uganda has repeatedly confronted emergencies that tested its resilience—from the destructive landslides in the Elgon and Rwenzori regions to the health and socio-economic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences have shown that no single institution can effectively manage crises alone.

The Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), Uganda Police Force, and Uganda Prisons Service have played frontline roles in disaster response, demonstrating their capacity to rapidly mobilize, enforce emergency measures, and support vulnerable communities. Their success in past interventions has given Uganda a strong foundation for developing a coordinated Disaster Management Task Force. *Okoa Maisha 25* provided an opportunity to further refine these capabilities.



The CPX brought together defence, police, and civilian components in a simulation designed to test coordination across multiple sectors. Central to this approach were contributions from:

- Ministry of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, providing policy direction and coordination.

- Ministry of Works and Transport, ensuring logistics and mobility during emergencies.
- Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs, offering command structures and military support.
- Ministry of Internal Affairs, coordinating security forces including Police and Prisons.
- Uganda Red Cross Society and other humanitarian partners, providing emergency relief and community outreach.
- Local governments, such as Bulambuli District, representing communities most affected by disasters like floods and landslides.

This multisectoral involvement reflects Uganda's recognition that disaster preparedness must be inclusive, coordinated, and people-centered to achieve rapid response within the critical 12-hour window.

The Uganda Prisons Service (UPS) actively contributed six representatives, underscoring its expanding role in national disaster preparedness:

Senior **Commissioner of Prisons Frank Baine**, Advisor to the Head of Mission

Commissioner **of Prisons Apollo Akankunda**, CPX Evaluator

Senior **Superintendent of Prisons Deogracious Ogwapit**, CPX Umpire

Senior **Superintendent of Prisons Doreen Asiimwe**, CPX Player

Superintendent **of Prisons Papus Muhirizi**, CPX Player

Assistant **Superintendent of Prisons Mutoni**, CPX Player

Their involvement highlighted UPS's capacity to go beyond custodial duties and support humanitarian operations, particularly in crisis management, logistics, and rehabilitation of affected populations.

Okoa Maisha 25 follows a Table Top Exercise held in March 2025 and will culminate in a Field Training Exercise later this year, bringing together even more stakeholders to practically test Uganda's ability to respond to complex disasters.

The closing ceremony drew delegations from ministries, departments, agencies, humanitarian organizations, and representatives from disaster-prone districts like Bulambuli. Their collective presence reflected the government's recognition that disaster management is not just a security task but a whole-of-society commitment.

As Uganda continues to face threats from natural disasters, climate change, and public health emergencies, the lessons from *Okoa Maisha 25* are expected to strengthen preparedness, improve inter-agency collaboration, and ensure that the country remains resilient in times of crisis.



