

# Ugandans to the rescue



10/29/2010

MPs back Ugandan president's plea for £24m jet upgrade

- £16m aircraft bought in 2000 said to be out of date
- **Donors likely to echo newspapers' disgust**

The Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, is to buy a new Gulfstream presidential jet for £24m after convincing MPs that his £16m plane bought seven years ago is out of date. **Does anybody care about Uganda? This Plane was bought a few years ago at an exorbitant price, now he needs a new one!**

MPs on the presidential affairs committee approved the purchase this week after a presentation by Museveni's chief pilot, who said the G5 jet would be cheaper to maintain and use less fuel. The plans have caused outrage in Uganda, where one in three people live on less than a dollar a day and donor funding is vital. **But what about the roads, schools, hospitals or the whole Ugandan infrastructure that has deteriorated in the last 25 years!** Does the parliament care?

But Mary Karoro, who chairs the presidential committee, said the jet would be a "national asset". "We believe that this is not a luxury for the president," she told the local New Vision newspaper. **Can you please elaborate on how it's going to be a national asset? How is a Police officer who hasn't been paid in months gona benefit from this purchase?**

Donors are unlikely to agree. In 2000, when Museveni purchased his current Gulfstream G4, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank deferred a decision to cancel debts of £400m.

Britain last month announced a 10-year £700m poverty reduction package.

"All UK aid that goes directly to the Ugandan government is for poverty reduction purposes and supports the national poverty eradication action plan," said the Department for International Development. "It is accounted for by the ministry of finance and the Bank of Uganda and donors actively review these accounts."

In Kampala, newspapers were roundly critical of the decision to upgrade the jet, reminding readers of Museveni's famous speech when he came to power in 1986, in which he mocked the expensive tastes of African leaders. "The honorable Excellency who is going to the United Nations in executive jets, but has a population at home of 90% walking barefoot, is nothing but a pathetic spectacle," he said at the time. **Jiggers killing people but the president needs another jet**

His government has spent already lavishly this year, forking out £79m on hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Chogm), and a reported £27m for a presidential palace refurbishment. In an editorial, the Weekly Observer questioned the president's priorities,

## *Ugandans to the rescue*



10/29/2010

noting that "parts of the country are ravaged by floods, Ebola, cholera, malaria, and even plague!"

**We can write, talk, sing and complain about all this but until we rise up against this tyrant, Uganda and Ugandans will not be free**

"Why should a leader of a poor country fly a jet when leaders of some of the industrialized countries he begs from travel on commercial flights? Look no further; British prime minister Gordon Brown arrived in Uganda Chogm aboard a British Airways plane."

Gulfstream, an American manufacturer, did not want to comment on the sale. But Karooro's assertion that the current jet was "a threat to the president's security" appears questionable unless the aircraft has been badly maintained. Of the 535 G4 jets sold by Gulfstream since 1987, more than 500 are still flying today. **The country's financial institutions have been turned into an individual's own income and expenditure.**

John Nagenda, senior media adviser to Museveni, played down the controversy, insisting that the deal was not yet done. "We need to wait a bit longer before this is confirmed," he said. "First of all one has to find the money to buy the new plane."

But given that Museveni personally initiated the search for a new jet, telling MPs that the upgrade was necessary because the G4 was no longer in production and that there was no capacity in Uganda to stock spare parts, the purchase seems likely to go ahead. He stared down donors in 2000 when they questioned his decision to buy the jet, and debt relief soon followed.

Three years later the G4 was back in the news, after Museveni used it to fly his pregnant daughter to Germany to give birth. The taxpayers' bill was £15,000. **It's up to us Ugandans to take what steps necessary to kick out this kind of abuse**