

UPE Now Compulsory, Says President

New Vision (Kampala)

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PARENTS and guardians who keep children of school-going age from gaining primary education will be arrested, the President has said.

"I must remind all parents that Universal Primary Education (UPE) is now not only free but also compulsory. All our children of school going age must be at school and nowhere else," Yoweri Museveni said.

UPE was introduced in 1996 and currently has over seven million beneficiaries.

"I want to instruct the Police and all the local leaders to deal with people who keep our children and deny them the opportunity to acquire education."

The directive was contained a speech read by the presidency minister, Beatrice Wabudeya, on Monday during celebrations to commemorate the Day of the African Child at Luweero district playground.

The Day of the African Child is observed annually to honour thousands of black children killed on the streets of Soweto, South Africa in 1976.

They were protesting the poor quality of education and the violation of their rights.

The President said the National Resistance Movement believes that the surest way of ensuring healthy growth of children is to immunise them.

He explained that since 1986, immunisation improves yearly, with a coverage of over 85% currently.

"Before our children can be seen and heard, they must survive the killer diseases."

According to the demographic health survey, the infant mortality rate reduced from 89 deaths per 1,000 births in 2001 to 75 deaths per 1,000 births in 2006.

The death of children aged five and below has also reduced from 158 per 1,000 births to 137 in the same period.

The President noted that the problem of stunted growth of children still loomed.

"Nearly four in 10 children under five are stunted, while 16% are underweight."

Museveni attributed this to ignorance on the part of parents. Celebrants planted trees in memory of the children killed in Soweto.

Wabudeya inspected a children's parade and launched the National Child Participation Guide, a platform for children's voices.