PRESS STATEMENT

Date: Tuesday, 13th October 2026

UGANDA COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

ILLEGAL WI-FI HOTSPOTS

Proliferation of unlicensed public Wi-Fi hotspot operations affects the integrity of Uganda's communications sector, government revenue, consumer protection, and national security.

The Uganda Communications Commission has completed its assessment of the operations of these illegal operators and is now moving to enforcement.

Scale of the Problem

Approximately 4,000 unlicensed providers are currently offering public Wi-Fi services across the country.

They do this mainly by purchasing high-speed fixed broadband, fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) and Fixed Wireless Access (FWA), including 5G FWA from operators and then resell access to the public without a licence. The current average 1GB retail price for licensed operators is UGX 2,000 with taxes and all costs met. These illegal operators are selling this service at UGX 1,000 and not paying government taxes. This is not considered offering affordable internet services; this is an economic crime.

This activity is estimated to have caused an annual loss of government tax revenue of about UGX 148 billion, and this value continues to surge. It also undermines licensed operators who invest in networks, pay taxes, and meet regulatory obligations.

Why This Is Illegal and Harmful

Under the Uganda Communications Act, 2013, no person may provide telecommunications services to the public without a licence issued by the Commission.

Unlicensed operations create serious risks:

1. ***No consumer protection***: users have no quality standards, no reliable complaints mechanism, and limited recourse when service fails or personal data is misused.
2. ***Network interference and poor quality:*** unapproved equipment can disrupt licensed networks.
3. ***Revenue leakage:*** the activity constitutes an economic offence that deprives the government of taxes needed for public services.

4. ***Damage to public Infrastructure:*** WiFi routers are mounted on public infrastructure including electricity poles, infrastructure owned by other telecom operators without commercial approval or authorization. This in some cases has caused safety risks with installers getting electrocuted or limiting UEDCL team in the maintenance of their fibre cables.
5. ***Security and lack of traceability:*** these hotspots sit outside subscriber registration and lawful interception frameworks. Incidents cannot be properly attributed.

In short, cheap or convenient access that operates outside the law exposes users and the country to avoidable risks.

Enforcement Measures Being Implemented

The Commission is working with the Uganda Revenue Authority to block importation of telecommunications equipment by unlicensed operators.

A nationwide enforcement exercise is imminent. It will involve identification and take-down of illegal installations and seizure of routers and related equipment. Equipment that cannot be regularised will be destroyed in accordance with the law. The Commission encourages all illegal operators to immediately cease all operations and wilfully take down all routers and WiFi hotspot apparatus.

These measures are intended to protect government revenue, restore fair competition, improve traceability, and safeguard consumers.

Message to the Public

We encourage all customers to obtain internet services only from operators licensed by the Uganda Communications Commission.

Using unlicensed hotspots exposes you to service disruption when enforcement takes place, potential data privacy and cybersecurity risks, and no avenue for redress.

Licensed providers are required to meet quality, security, and consumer-protection standards. You can verify the licensing status of any provider on the Commission's website or by contacting UCC.

If you are currently using or operating an unlicensed hotspot, regularise immediately or cease the activity. Continued operation will attract enforcement.

Closing

The Commission's objective is an orderly, secure, and sustainable communications sector that serves all Ugandans while protecting public revenue and national security.

We remain open to operators who are willing to comply and obtain the necessary authorisations. What we will not allow is the continued provision of public communications services outside the law.

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