

Split emerges among cargo clearing agents

Whereas one group has called for a strike, the other says these are personal sentiments

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A split has emerged among officials of an association for clearing and forwarding agents, with some disputing strike calls and saying those calling for industrial action were doing it as individuals.

Mr William Ojonyo, who leads a splinter group of the Kenya International Warehousing Association (Kifwa), was yesterday expected to present a petition to Treasury Secretary Henry Rotich over what he said was failure by Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) to renew members' trading licences.

In a statement to newsrooms yesterday, KRA Commissioner General John Njiraini said the exercise was being implemented "with objectivity and due regard to fairness," noting that over 90 per cent of the current licence holders had submitted their required information to facilitate renewal.

"Given the criticality of clearing &

forwarding services in safeguarding national security and public revenue, it is imperative that persons entrusted with this role, exhibit the highest standards of ethical and business conduct," Mr Njiraini said.

"The ongoing initiative to evaluate applicant suitability is meant to achieve this objective prior to the renewal of licenses," he said yesterday.

But Kifwa national vice chairman Eric Gitonga disowned the petition, saying the association had not asked its members to down their tools, adding that issues they had raised with KRA were being handled "amicably".

"Whatever Ojonyo is doing is personal. We have not asked agents to go on strike and we urge them to continue collecting revenue as normal," he said.

The splinter group had in a Monday statement said customs agents had decided to stop collecting taxes and making payments to banks, adding that they would not collect cargo from the port until their grievances

were addressed.

He claimed there was a scheme by KRA to license only 200 agents leaving out over 1,000 others in what he alleges is a plot to kick out the small clearing and forwarding agent out of business.

The taxman introduced a new document – the stakeholder bio data form – before consultations with the agents which violated members' constitutional rights, said Mr Ojonyo, also managing director Keihin Logistics Limited.

"There have been issues regarding renewal of our licenses but we have discussed this with KRA commissioner general John Njiraini who extended the deadline to April and there is no controversy over the matter," Mr Gitonga said, and accused Mr Ojonyo of "peddling lies to gain mileage".

"Who said KRA intends to license only 200 agents? Those are lies. We have said our intention is to bring sanity in this business and those who are not ready to play by the rules should not derail us," said Mr Gitonga, managing director Keihin Maritime Services Limited.

"Although renewal of licenses has delayed we have not been stopped from doing business because our passwords on the Simba online system have not been blocked," he said.

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The percentage of the current permit holders who had submitted the required information to the KRA