

KBC workers take strike to day five

Nairobi: Striking Kenya Broadcasting Corporation workers demonstrated on the streets of Nairobi on Sunday, 4 March 2012, seeking audience with prime minister Raila Odinga.

They first converged at the corporation's Broadcasting House headquarters before they marched through the city streets, chanting and waving placards to the prime minister's office on Harambee Avenue.

"We want the prime minister to intervene in this matter because it is getting worse," a journalist at the state owned broadcaster, Vincent Lempaa who led the group, said on telephone.

Officials at the prime minister's office told them the prime minister had agreed to meet their representative on Monday morning to address their grievances which led to the strike that has crippled operations of the state broadcaster for the fifth day.

Lempaa said the strike is still on despite threats by information minister, Samuel Poghio, who vowed to sack anyone who failed to report to work by Friday last week.

The minister told reporters he had ordered the KBC management to advertise positions of employees who did not report to work in Monday's newspapers.

"These are empty threats and we have said we will not be cowed at all. Our strike is justified and we believe we followed the proper channels," Lempaa said.

Broadcast operations remained paralysed at the state broadcaster, with the TV station and radio not airing news bulletins.

Secretary general of the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU), Francis Atwoli has however, urged the striking workers to resume work and let their union resolve their grievances.

He said the strike had no backing of the union because it is illegal.

"KBC staff should get off the roads and let COTU through their trade union resolve their issues with the government through the proper channels," Atwoli said.

"Going to the streets without having followed the proper channels to resolve the issue is not professionalism," he added.

Poghio last week said "those who will not have gone back to work would be deemed to have absconded duty."

"I am directing the management and the board of KBC to proceed and advertise those vacancies by Monday next week," the minister said.

"What the minister is saying is a total contradiction of what his assistant told parliament. The strike will continue," Lempaa said.

Another employee of KBC who requested to remain anonymous said, "We will not be intimidated by the minister. Let him know that the strike has just started. We are not going to be threatened, why can't the minister come and address us here."

The minister however, said he would only engage the workers in dialogue once they resumed work, since they did not follow proper procedure in calling the strike.

"We allowed them to join the Communications Union to represent them in channeling their grievances but they did not follow the right channel, as such the strike is illegal," he said.

Poghisio directed restructuring of the state corporation to be undertaken to trim the bloated workforce of 1 200 staff. Out of these, only 191 are members of the Communications Workers Union of Kenya which has also disowned the strike.

"We want to remain with the right number of staff who can effectively serve the corporation, as currently constituted, the staff is bloated. I have directed the board and management to start comprehensive restructuring," he said.

KBC staff has been on strike since Wednesday when they vowed to remain out of their work stations to protest failure by the government to implement their 500 percent pay increase deal.

But Poghisio insists that all their grievances had been addressed and were being implemented in phases.

Source: allAfrica.com

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