



MBARARA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (MUST)

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Office of the Vice Chancellor

Ref: MUST 16/4

24th April 2026

The Clerk to Parliament
Parliament House,
Parliamentary Avenue,
P.O. Box 7178,
Kampala, Uganda

Dear Mr. Adolf Mwesige Kasaija,

RE: OBSERVATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PROTECTION OF SOVEREIGNTY BILL, 2026 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

I write on behalf of Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) to respectfully submit the University's observations on the *Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026*, currently under consideration.

MUST fully appreciates and supports the Government's commitment to safeguarding Uganda's sovereignty and protecting national interests from undue external influence. As a public university, we remain committed to operating within the laws, policies and national development priorities of Uganda.

As you are aware MUST like other national Universities, is established under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act and carries out a public mandate in teaching, research, innovation, community engagement and public service. In carrying out this mandate, the University routinely undertakes research projects, academic partnerships, technical cooperation, grants, scholarships, staff and student exchanges, innovation activities and collaborations with local and international partners.

Upon review of the Bill, the University's respectful concern is therefore limited to ensuring that the Bill, while achieving its important national objective, does not unintentionally affect lawful public university functions undertaken within approved Government and institutional frameworks.

The University's comments are therefore intended to support the objective of the Bill while proposing refinements that may assist in its practical implementation.

1. **Impact on Research Funding, Innovation and the Public University Mandate (Clauses 1 and 6)**
2. **Clause 1** defines an “*agent of a foreigner*” broadly to include a person whose activities are directly or indirectly financed, supervised, directed, controlled or supported by a foreigner.

Clause 6 further restricts a person or agent of a foreigner from exercising functions or services for which Government is responsible without the necessary approval. MUST appreciates the purpose of this provision.

MUST appreciates the purpose of these provisions, particularly the need to guard against improper foreign influence over Government functions and national priorities. However, their broad wording may unintentionally cover Public Universities, staff, researchers, students, project teams and institutional units engaged in legitimate foreign-funded research, international grants, scholarships, technical cooperation and approved institutional partnerships.

Public Universities are already Government institutions performing statutory public functions under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act. MUST’s teaching, training, research, innovation, health-related research and community engagement activities are therefore part of its lawful public mandate.

The University appreciates the Government of Uganda’s continued support towards research and innovation funding in universities. At the same time, Public Universities such as MUST also rely on competitive international research funding to support critical work in health, science, technology, innovation and community transformation. These collaborations and funding arrangements directly support Uganda’s development priorities and are ordinarily undertaken through approved institutional, ethical, regulatory and financial accountability frameworks.

The University respectfully proposes that the Bill clarifies that Public Universities and Government institutions performing their statutory functions under existing laws and approved frameworks shall not require additional classification or approval merely because a programme, research project or institutional activity has external support, provided that such support is received and applied in accordance with applicable laws and Government or institutional approval processes.

3. **Implications for International Collaboration (Clauses 1 and 2)**

As already pointed out above, **Clause 1** of the Bill defines an “agent of a foreigner” broadly, while **Clause 2** extends the application of the Act to activities including engagement with Government, funding arrangements and influencing public discourse.

Academic partnerships, joint research initiatives, consortia, technical cooperation, visiting scholar arrangements and staff and student exchanges are essential to knowledge generation, capacity building and institutional growth.

MUST appreciates that the Bill seeks to prevent improper foreign influence. However, broad regulatory requirements on engagement with foreign entities may unintentionally slow or constrain legitimate academic collaborations, even where such collaborations are undertaken transparently and within approved institutional and Government frameworks.

The University respectfully proposes that the Bill clarifies that approved academic and research collaborations with foreign universities, development partners and recognised institutions shall not, by themselves, be treated as foreign agency or improper foreign influence.

4. **Operational and Administrative Burden (Clauses 14 and 21–26)**

Clause 14 provides for registration of agents of foreigners, while **Clauses 21 to 26** introduce requirements relating to declaration, restriction, reporting and submission of returns on foreign funding.

MUST supports the objective of ensuring transparency and accountability. However, for public universities, these provisions may introduce additional administrative layers over activities that are already regulated through established legal and institutional frameworks.

For MUST, this may increase administrative demands, divert resources from core academic and research functions, and affect the timeliness of project implementation and service delivery. It may also affect the predictability required for securing and managing research funding and partnerships.

The University respectfully proposes that the implementation of these provisions be harmonised with existing frameworks applicable to Public Universities, including the Public Finance Management Act, the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, University Council and Management approvals, Solicitor General clearance where applicable, research ethics approvals, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology requirements, procurement laws, data protection requirements, immigration requirements and donor accountability mechanisms.

5. **Human Resource and Institutional Governance Challenges (Clauses 1 and 14)**

The combined effect of **Clause 1** and **Clause 14**, relating to the definition and registration of agents of foreigners, may create uncertainty as to whether Public University staff, researchers, students or project teams engaged in externally supported activities fall within this classification.

For MUST, this may create ambiguity in roles, reporting lines, accountability frameworks and institutional governance, particularly where staff and students are engaged in legitimate research, innovation and academic programmes supported through external funding.

This may also affect staff morale, recruitment and retention, especially for highly skilled personnel involved in specialised research programmes.

The University respectfully proposes that the Bill clarifies that Public University staff, researchers, students and institutional units acting in good faith within approved university, Government, ethical, regulatory and financial accountability frameworks shall not be subject to additional classification or compliance requirements solely on account of externally supported activities.

6. **Academic Freedom, Research and Policy Engagement (Clauses 7 and 8)**

Clauses 7 and 8 provide for the development and implementation of Government policy and restrict unauthorised involvement in these processes.

MUST fully recognises that formal Government policy-making is the mandate of Government. At the same time, Public Universities play a critical role in generating evidence, conducting research and providing technical expertise to support national development.

Universities support Government through research, evidence generation, technical advice, policy studies, public health interventions, innovation and participation in Government-led consultations. These activities are complementary to Government functions and do not amount to the assumption of policy-making authority.

The University respectfully proposes that the Bill clarifies that academic research, technical advice, evidence generation, scholarly dissemination and participation in Government-led consultations by public universities or recognised research institutions shall not be construed as unlawful development, implementation or interference with Government policy.

7. **Proposed Considerations**

In light of the above, MUST respectfully proposes that

- a) Consideration be given to providing clear terms within the Bill to avoid unintended broad application to Public Universities, accredited higher education institutions, recognised research institutions and lawful research activities undertaken within approved frameworks.
- b) Tailored provisions be considered for public universities and recognised research institutions, particularly where they are performing statutory functions in teaching, research, innovation, public service, grants management, scholarships, technical cooperation and approved academic collaboration.
- c) The approval, registration and reporting mechanisms under the Bill be streamlined and harmonised with existing legal and institutional frameworks applicable to public universities and Government institutions.

- d) Stakeholder engagement be undertaken with the higher education and research sector to ensure that the final legislation supports both national sovereignty and academic advancement.

For avoidance of doubt, the University respectfully proposes that consideration be given to including a saving provision to the following effect:

"A public university, accredited higher education institution, recognised research institution or Government institution shall not be deemed an agent of a foreigner solely by reason of receiving foreign funding, grants, scholarships, technical assistance, or participating in approved academic, research, innovation, public service or institutional collaboration, provided that such activity is undertaken in accordance with the Constitution, the Public Finance Management Act, the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, applicable research ethics and regulatory approvals, and approved Government or institutional frameworks".

Conclusion

MUST reiterates its full support for the objective of protecting Uganda's sovereignty. The University's observations are intended to ensure that the final legislation achieves this important national purpose while preserving lawful research, innovation, academic collaboration and public service activities that contribute to Uganda's development agenda.

MUST remains ready to engage constructively with your office and other relevant stakeholders towards a balanced framework that protects national interests while preserving the vital role of public universities in research, innovation and human capital development.

We appreciate your consideration of these matters and look forward to continued collaboration in advancing Uganda's development agenda.

Yours faithfully,



Professor Pauline Byakika-Kibwika

VICE CHANCELLOR

Mbarara University of Science and Technology



Copy: The Minister of Education and Sports
The Chairperson, Parliamentary Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs
The Executive Director, National Council for Higher Education
The Chairperson, MUST Council