

Court asks striking Kenya Airways pilots to resume work

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A labour court on Tuesday ordered pilots at Kenya Airways to resume work by Wednesday, seeking to end a strike that has left thousands of passengers stranded at one of Africa's most important aviation hubs.



Kenya Airways pilots attend a court session after the association's management was summoned for contempt of a court order declaring as illegal the ongoing strike of Kenya Airways pilots, organised by KALPA, at the Milimani Law Courts, in Nairobi, Kenya, November 8, 2022.
REUTERS/Monica Mwangi

Members of the Kenya Airline Pilots Association (Kalpa), which represents about 400 pilots at the carrier, went on strike on Saturday after failing to resolve a dispute over pension contributions and settlement of deferred pay.

On Tuesday, a labour and employment court judge ordered the pilots to resume their duties "unconditionally" at 6 am, local time (3.00 GMT) on Wednesday.

The court also stopped the airline's management from taking disciplinary actions against pilots who took part in the industrial action.

The court had restrained the union from embarking on the strike, and the airline sought to cite the union's officials for contempt of court after the strike started. The court will continue hearing the dispute, Judge Anne Mwaure said.

Kenya Airways welcomed the court's directions and said it would comply.

The union said in a statement it had asked its members to report to work on Wednesday as ordered by the court.



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The pilots' walkout has so far cost the airline an estimated more than \$2m daily, affected more than 10,000 passengers and led to the cancellation of dozens of flights.

Kenya Airways, which is nearly 50% owned by the government, earlier said it planned to cancel its bargaining and recognition agreements with the pilots union, saying their current strike was unlawful and amounted to economic sabotage.

The union is demanding the resumption of regular payments to its members' pension plan, which were stopped in 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic started, and the payment of pension arrears. It also wants the carrier to start paying salaries that were deferred during the health crisis.

The airline's management says it has been working hard to fully recover from the pandemic and accuses the pilots of jeopardising that push.

Financial turmoil at Kenya Airways preceded the pandemic. The airline sank deep into the red after it borrowed heavily to buy new aircraft at a time when its passenger business slumped mainly due to frequent militant attacks in Kenya.

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