

EA e-passport to be issued early next year

By James Karuhanga

THE JUST-concluded 35th East African Community (EAC) Council of Ministers' meeting at the EAC Headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania has directed Partner States to commence issuance of the new regional e-passport by January 31, 2018.

A statement issued after the meeting indicates that this came after the consideration of the different status of preparedness by the Partner States.

"The EA e-passport is expected to boost free movement of people across the region and it will be in line with implementation of the Common Market protocol which guaranteed the right to move between countries in East Africa," reads part of the Council statement.

The Council directives came after the 17th Ordinary Summit of EAC Heads of State in March 2016 had directed the Partner States to commence issuance of



Immigration officials from the EAC Partner States display the EA passport during the 16th Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government last year. *Courtesy.*

the new east African electronic passport by January 1, 2017, and implement the phase out programme for the current machine readable east African and national passports from Janu-

ary 1 this year to December 31, 2018.

After the March 2016 Summit, EAC partner states had up to December 2018 to phase out their national passports.

The regional e-passport will have diplomatic, service and ordinary categories and is different from the current machine readable passport being issued by the Partner States.

"It will be valid for up to 10 years while the diplomatic passport and service passport will be valid according to specific terms of the service of the holder."

The standard international e-passport will have a chip that holds the same information printed on the passport's data page, the holder's name, date of birth, and other biographic information. It will also contain a biometric identifier and have a digital photograph of the holder and security features to prevent unauthorised reading or "scanning" of stored data.

The new EAC travel document will come in red, green and sky blue — colours of the EAC flag — but with text and national emblems, in gold to complete its face. Diplomats will carry a red passport, officials a green passport, and ordinary citizens a sky blue colour.

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