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KAMPALA & KIKUUBE

Govt should halt eviction of over 3,000 people from Bugoma forest villages

Boundary opening should also be concluded

Communities surrounding Bugoma forest in Kikuube district have asked government to stop an ongoing eviction process that has seen over 350 homes being demolished and another about 3,000 people being thrown out of their farmlands.

The community members from over ten villages accuse security personnel from the army and the police of forcing people out of their homes and gardens on April 7, 2022 claiming that the people were trespassing on land belonging to Hoima Sugar Limited.

The affected villages are Tripona/Nyabongo and Muhangazima. In these villages, 350 families were evicted from their homes. In the villages of Rwembaho, Rwenkobe, Karokarungi A&B, Wairagaza, Nsozi, Kikora and others, about 3,000 people were evicted from their farmlands.

The residents argue that the eviction was done in complete disregard of due process given that there have been ongoing negotiations to open the boundaries of Bugoma forest championed by the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC), including local communities.

On February 23, 2022, the Ministry of Lands organised a meeting that was attended by Bugoma forest host communities, SBFC members, Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom officials and the Ministry of Lands. This meeting, which took place in Kikuube district, agreed that the Bugoma forest boundary opening exercise is resumed to confirm the Bugoma forest boundaries, as well as any boundaries for stakeholders with an interest in land neighbouring Bugoma forest.

It will be recalled that the Bugoma forest boundary opening exercise which began in November 2021 stalled in December 2021 after unknown people uprooted boundary marks that had been planted by the Ministry of Lands.

In the February 23, 2022 meeting, officials from the Ministry of Lands assured communities that no one will be evicted from their land even after the boundary opening. The officials noted that the Parliament of Uganda will need to pass a resolution on what to do for whoever is found within the forest boundaries. Officials from Bunyoro Kingdom also assured residents that the kingdom did not intend to evict anyone.

Therefore, the Bugoma forest communities were shocked when security forces evicted them, contrary to earlier promises by government to protect the people.

According to Mr. Desire Murenzi, the chairperson of Nyairongo village and a member of the SBFC local taskforce, the eviction is the work of Hoima Sugar, which is trying to deprive his constituents of a livelihood.

He says his people were left homeless and hungry after their houses were demolished and crops destroyed. Victims have since camped at the office of the L.C.5 chairperson while others found shelter in the areas around the forest as well as at Nsozi P/S in Kyagwali, Kikuube district.

“The situation is alarming,” Mr. Murenzi said, adding that the victims, with the help of local leaders and the SBFC, reached out to different concerned parties but they were not helped.

DEMANDS

The evicted communities are making the following demands:

- That people are allowed to harvest their crops as they have nowhere to get food. If this request is ignored, there is worry that food shortages may trigger crimes such as theft.
- That the Kikuube district security team headed by the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) and Ministry of Lands officials explain how the evictions happened.
- That the boundary opening exercise for Bugoma Forest is resumed and concluded to protect the forest and communities.
- Finally, that security is guaranteed to protect women and children who have suffered since Bugoma forest started being destroyed.

ENDS

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