

Abid Alam implicated in fresh evictions

Eddie Ssejjoba

The Commission of Inquiry into land management has received evidence implicating businessman Alam Abid in fresh eviction in breach of its directive to halt further development on the 12sq. miles of land in Kassanda South Constituency, Mubende district.

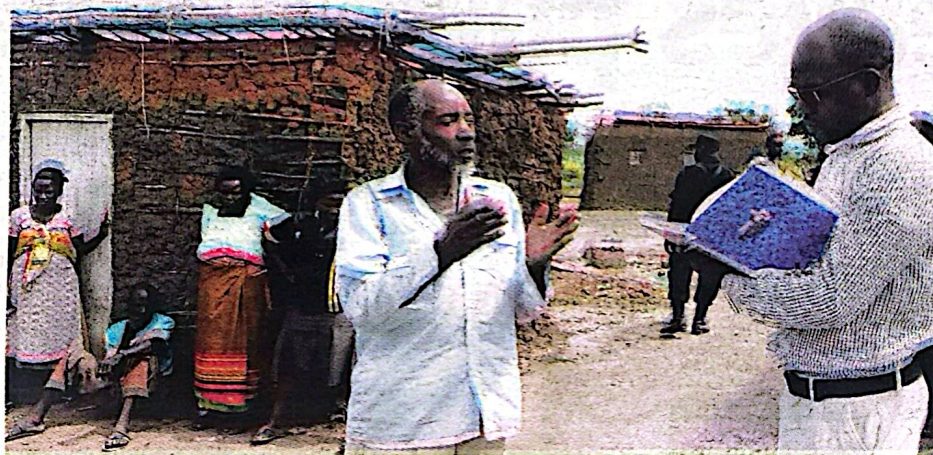
The commission chairperson, Justice Catherine Bamugemereire, last month ordered the arrest and detention of Abid Alam at Wandegaya Police Station over defying the commission's orders to halt further activities on the disputed land. He was released on Police bond as investigations into allegations continued.

Abid is a prominent entrepreneur and the proprietor of Alam Group of Companies, Kaliro Sugar works, as well as other businesses.

Last week, the commission's investigators, Eric Naigambi and Edward Kagoro returned to the scene and interviewed residents over alleged fresh evictions.

Godfrey Muhairwe, 24, told the investigators that on November 8 this year, a group of Rukiga-speaking men attacked their homes. They were travelling on three pick-up trucks and a tractor in company of Abid Alam.

He said the villagers fled



Naigambi (right) interviewing Ernest Byakatonda, a resident, about the alleged attacks by men hired by Abid Alam over eviction claims. Photo by Eddie Ssejjoba

in different directions as the armed men pursued them.

David Lubangaazi, 23, said he was at home with his family, when the men attacked him. He alleged to have sustained a cut on his neck.

Michael Kintu, 32, the vice-chairperson of the area, said Abid went there three days before the attack and rubbished the commission's order. He allegedly vowed that he would clear the entire area to set up a sugarcane plantation.

Kintu said the residents

ON THE GROUND

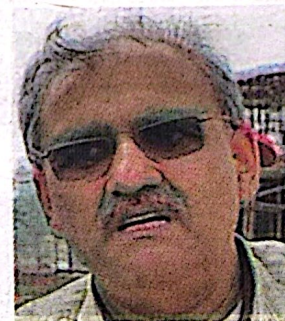
According to Michael Kintu, the vice-chairperson of the area, Abid went there three days before the attack and rubbished the commission's order. Abid allegedly vowed to clear the entire area, to set up a sugarcane plantation.

became furious and attempted to attack Abid, who was taking their photos, while in a meeting, questioning his intentions, but he (Kintu) calmed them down.

"Two days later, I was in my garden and heard people shouting and others running into the bushes. I came and saw the men pulling down the church," Kintu said.

He explained that Abid's security guard shot twice in the air to scare away the people who wanted to fight back.

Naigambi, however, told the



Abid Alam

residents that they should continue to report cases of torture and any attacks to the Police and demand to be issued with reference numbers.

He said the commission had returned in the area for a fact-finding mission to physically see what happened and talk to those who were affected.

The investigators also interviewed Abid's manager, Muhammad Ntanda at Kakungube Police Post.

He said he was part of the team that clashed with the villagers and argued that they were taking men they hired from Kisoro in western Uganda to clear the bushes in preparation for planting sugarcane.

"When villagers saw the men, they reacted angrily, saying they had come to evict them," Ntanda said.

He said Abid, who was driving

from behind, was caught in the fracas and had to flee.

Ntanda said a private security guard called Moses Kamahanga, who had been hired by Abid was attacked and beaten, together with a manager, Lawrence Kawuma, alias Kamuswaga.

He said the guard's gun went missing during the fracas, but was recovered the following day and handed over to the Police.

He explained that Abid has so far planted sugarcane on 300 acres at Rwamasanga village.

"The villagers misinterpreted our move. We took men to clear the land, not to evict people, but when they saw the tools, such as pangas, they attacked us and, in the process, our workers abandoned the work and fled," Ntanda explained.

He said after Abid's arrest, more people started returning to the area and re-settled on the land they had been evicted from.

The investigators sought to interview the district Police commander, to give his side of the story about the actions he took after the clash, but he was reportedly away.

Since 2008, Abid has been battling to evict people on the 12sq.miles of land he claims ownership. The land comprises six villages of Kika A and B, Bukoba, Bukompe, Rwamasanga and Kabagala.

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