

BY FRANKLIN DRAKU
fdraku@ug.nationmedia.com

Residents count losses after Kimi Island fire

KAMPALA. Residents of Kimi Island in Kkoombe Sub-county in Mukono District are yet to come to terms with their losses after fire destroyed the entire island, reducing it to rubbles.

The Monday morning fire left close to 5,000 people homeless and property worth billions of shillings destroyed.

One resident said: "We have lost our entire lives and what is now left is for us to follow what we have lost. We are finished and if nothing is done, many of us will prefer drowning in the lake."

The island found in Busonga Parish, hosts people from all over the country and beyond, including citizens of Tanzania, DR Congo, Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda and a host of other countries.

Two people died in the inferno and more than two hundred were injured. Residents say those injured have never been taken for better management and are being treated locally within the community. One of the dead was identified only as Mustafa, 35, and another whom the residents said had just arrived on the Island and was burnt with all identi-

fications.

All the clinics and health facilities within the 73 acre island have been destroyed and the only primary school has been turned into an emergency accommodation centre, with pupils remaining at home.

Mr Abdul Karim Kigwa, the LCI chairperson of the island, says the fire broke out at about 2am when one of the residents, a chicken farmer, left a candle burning to warm chicks. Fire from the candle reportedly spread to some objects in the chicken house and later to other houses and within a short time, the entire island was up in flames.

According to Mr Kigwa, by the time the residents woke up, it was too late to save anything. He estimated the cost of damages to about Shs40 billion, although he said it could be higher.

The situation was compounded by the fact that hundreds of litres of petrol are kept in houses, which exacerbated the problem.

"We have lost everything and there is no future for us. The island has been a busy centre and with everything de-

stroyed, we don't know where to go next," Mr Kigwa said.

He added that 20 tonnes of fish, 150 boat engines, more than 300 hundred shops and more than 200 houses were razed in the inferno.

He said the island is in a desperate situation and need urgent intervention from the government and well-wishers.

Shs40m

Loss. Estimated damages inflicted by Kimi Island fire.

Mr Juma Kasimagwa, the councillor for Busongwa Parish, said the situation is dire, adding that they have written to different authorities both in Mukono District and to the Disaster Preparedness ministry and are waiting for a response.

He said although some aid had started coming in, it is not enough to meet the demands of the residents.

Irene Kauma, a 31-year-old mother

of three, said she lost everything she has been depending on to cater for the family. She said when the fire broke out, they were caught unaware and left with no option, they only ran to save their lives and left everything to burn.

She added that even the little they attempted to save eventually caught fire because there was nowhere they could keep them.

Nasiwa Sara, a mother of four, said before the fire broke out, she had stocked a lot of merchandise, which was all destroyed in few minutes. "I don't know where to start from and what to do next," she said amid tears.

Aid

The Chimpanzee Trust has already provide a number of relief aid to those affected. Plastic plates and cups, blankets, food stuff, clothes and assortment of other items have been delivered to the affected residents, with more to be sent in the coming days.

Collection points have also been created at the Uganda Wildlife Au-

thority, Uganda Wildlife Education Centre Entebbe, Uganda Tourism Association and the Chimpanzee Trust at Entebbe.

Eric Ntalo, the Chimpanzee Trust public relations officer, said the situation needs urgent attention and called on all the concerned to come to the aid of the island residents.

He added that being a neighbouring community, they cannot look on when the people are suffering. The Ngamba Chimpanzee Sanctuary buys most of the supplies from the destroyed island and many people provide labour to the sanctuary.

Joseph Kaale, a senior educator and care giver at the sanctuary, said the inferno has disrupted some of their programmes because the sanctuary cannot get labour from the island.

The government is yet to make a statement on what relief it will provide. Some food and non-food items have already been delivered, though the residents say it is not enough. Both Hilary Onek, the minister for Relief and Disaster Preparedness, and his deputy, Mr Musa Bwemur, could not be reached for clarifications.