



At work. Artisanal miners at one of the sites in Bukuya Sub-county in Mubende before they were evicted.
PHOTO BY JOSEPHINE NNABBALE

Evicted miners threaten to return

Claim. The miners claim that government has failed to fulfil its promise of allocating them a new site.

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MUBENDE. Thousands of artisanal miners, who were recently evicted from gold mining sites in Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties of Mubende District, have vowed to forcefully return if government does not get them alternative site within 10 days.

Under their umbrella body Kitumbi-Kayonza Miners Association, the miners said since their eviction in August, they have been rendered jobless and can no longer fend for their families.

"When government was evicting us they claimed that we were encroaching on sites already allocated to foreign investors and promised to find us an alternative mining site within the district. We accepted but they have failed to fulfil the pledge," Mr Edward Ssenkusu, the chairperson of the miners association, said, during a press conference on Sunday.

In 2012, AUC Mining Company secured an exploration licence from the Directorate of Geological Survey and Mines (DGSM) in the Ministry of Energy to explore gold in an area of about 207.3747 square kilometres in Kitumbi Sub-county.

The company claims it has been unable to carry out any exploration on the land because of the influx of illegal miners.

On August 4, security forces commanded by Col Joseph Balikuddembe, the UPDF 1st Division commander, descended on the gold mining sites and ordered the miners to vacate within two hours.

Miners from neighbouring districts of Mityana, Sembabule and Wakiso quickly packed their belongings and departed. Others stared in disbelief and confusion as police and soldiers charged on them and hollered orders.

BACKGROUND

Number of mines.

Mubende District has seven gold mines in Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties that have witnessed emergence of small townships populated by labourers and traders seeking to eke out a living at the mines and from auxiliary businesses.

Population. Lujinji mining site, is estimated to have more than 10,000 miners.

Days after the operation, Mr Asuman Mugenyi, the police director for operations, said the mining sites had become hide-outs for criminals and that security forces had to intervene.

The gold business in Mubende has been thriving with one gram costing upward of Shs130,000 on the local market.

But government insists the miners were making money without paying taxes and, as

such, deprived government of revenue.

Mr Ssenkusu alleged that by the time of their eviction, their licence was still valid and that they were not given time to get their equipment from the mines.

The association which has at least 200 members, according to Mr Ssenkusu, possesses three location licenses, numbers LL1374, LL1375 and LL1376 which were renewed in November 2016 in accordance with Section 55 of the Mining Act, 2003.

"We feel this might be one of the tactics to delay us until our location licences expire," he said.

A location licence, according to the Mining Act, is a permission for prospecting and mining operations by methods which do not involve substantial expenditure and the use of specialised technology.

This is mostly meant for small-scale miners who do not have the capacity to afford high-tech equipment for mining.

New site

But Mr Robert Kasande, the acting permanent secretary at Ministry of Energy, said the threats by artisanal miners were uncalled for.

He said government has already allocated 10 square kilometres to artisanal miners who have formed associations.

"Unless those issuing threats are not under any association. If they attempt to return to the old sites, they risk being arrested," Mr Kasande said by telephone yesterday.