

CITY LAWYER ACCUSED OF EVICTING 4 VILLAGES

BY CHRIS KIWAULO

Over 100 residents from four villages in Kihura sub-county, Kyenjojo district, have petitioned the Justice Catherine Bamugemereire land probe commission, accusing a city lawyer of grabbing their land.

According to residents, Vincent Mugisha has illegally evicted them and caused their arrest, and that some of their colleagues were charged with criminal trespass and remanded to Kyenjojo Prison.

The residents accused Mugisha of claiming to be a Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) major attached to State House, adding that two Catholic churches have also not been spared.

The affected villages are: Nyakahaama, Matri, Kaiso and Kitooaga, where Mugisha is said to have taken over land measuring about 800 acres. He uses the land for crop growing and grazing animals.

In a petition of June 15, 2017, signed by 78 people, the residents stated: "We the residents of the above villages hereby petition your commission over the above mentioned Vincent Mugisha of Matri village, along the Fort Portal-Kampala highway. This is a dangerous land grabber who needs to be stopped by all means. We believe your commission is best placed to handle him."

The residents also accused Mugisha of assault, harassment, intimidation, arrogance, disrespecting their leaders, as well as using money to illegally evict them off huge chunks of their land.

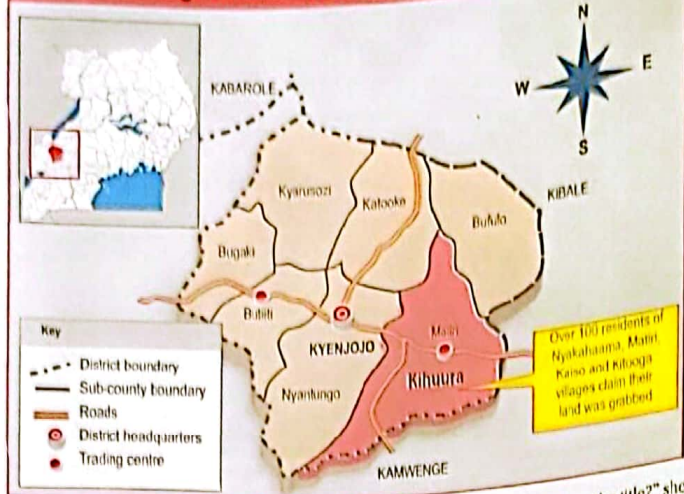
The Ganyinayo village chairperson, Muhereza Kaizirjo, is one of the several residents that were allegedly assaulted and arrested on the orders of Mugisha as he led residents to resist forceful evictions.

"He uses a troop of migrants who were evicted from Matri Forest Reserve (by National Forestry Authority) to clear grabbed land under his direct supervision," the residents' petition read.

The residents added: "Land-grabbing has involved taking over land belonging to Nyakahaama (Matri) and Ganyinayo Catholic churches in Matri parish. Mugisha has since stopped the Christians from carrying out some activities on behalf of the church. In the past, Fr Moses Mutangirizi, had tried to intervene in this issue, but Mugisha has shown that he is untouchable."

The family of the late Leo Rwakakara has also joined the petitioners over their land along the Kaiso and Nyankimba streams and wetland that they claim Mugisha is draining, yet the community has for ages been using it as a source of water.

Land grabbing in Kihura Sub-county, Kyenjojo district



Affected residents gather to explain their ordeal. They have asked the land probe team to intervene

BITTER FACTS

Mugisha simply comes and orders people to vacate their land. If you resist, he causes your arrest, claiming you have trespassed on his land. When we report him to the Police, it is us who end up getting arrested. We are suffering. Someone should come to our rescue.

MUGISHA RESPONDS
However, Mugisha denied claims that he was illegally evicting people from their land, and that he was branding himself a UPDF officer, saying he legally acquired the land.

"I am a lawyer. It is also not true that I am evicting people. I have never evicted any church in Nyakahaama (Matri) as those people claim because that church is outside my land. In fact, I put up a church on one of my pieces of land, where I also go for prayers," Mugisha explained.

He argued that he bought the contested land from the late Lt. Peter Rusibika, who had lived on it for over 20 years, and that he agreed with the residents to mark their boundaries, which are well known.

RESIDENTS SPEAK OUT
However, the late Rusibika's wife, Juliet Rusibika, said her family has never sold any land to Mugisha, adding that his claims were fraudulent.

"That man put our chairman in prison for trying to fight for people's rights. The land over which Mugisha is mistreating people is mine. How could we have sold the land to him

when I still have the title?" she wondered.

Juliet appealed to Justice Bamugemereire and her team to visit Kyenjojo and listen to the cries of residents whose land Mugisha allegedly grabbed.

Attempts to get a comment from Katzirjo (Ganyinayo chairman), who was reportedly assaulted and arrested over the land matter and later released, were futile as his known cellphone was switched off.

Omuheresa Baguma, a resident of Matri, said Mugisha claims to have bought over 300 acres of land, but he keeps on extending his boundaries into residents' land.

"Mugisha simply comes and orders people to vacate their land. If you resist, he causes your arrest claiming you have trespassed on his land. When we report him to the Police, we end up getting arrested instead. We are suffering. Someone should come to our rescue," he pleaded.

Baguma cited Kaaliwa and Tereza, who are on remand in Kyenjojo Prison over trespass after they tried to resist eviction from their land.

Another resident, who preferred anonymity, said he at first supported Mugisha when he promised to employ the residents, but fell out with him when he started mistreating people.

"Our matter is known by all leaders in the district but Mugisha cannot listen to anybody. We even petitioned the Police leadership in Kampala and the resident district commissioner (RDC), but nothing much has been done," noted the resident, who also signed the petition.

IMPUNITY
Kihura sub-county chairperson Richard Ndyababo, explained that Mugisha bought about 300

acres of land from Kanyankole about 10 years ago, and evicted all squatters on the land.

"But, after opening his boundaries, he started extending into other people's land and started grazing his animals and cultivating on it, which sparked off the complaints. He later claimed to have bought the late Rusibika's land measuring about 500 acres, but the widow (Juliet) says they have never sold to him and she has complained to State House," Ndyababo explained.

He said he has tried to intervene in the matter in vain and that Mugisha appears to be encroaching on people's land with impunity.

RDC SPEAKS OUT
Kyenjojo RDC, Isaac Kawonayo, said he was aware of the complaints that residents had levelled against Mugisha since he joined the

district three years ago. "Mugisha is not a UPDF officer and has no role in State House as claimed. He is a lawyer, but people are harassing them saying he is a soldier. He also used to be an armed Police bodyguard. I intervened and the matter was withdrawn," Kawonayo explained.

As the chairperson of the district security committee, Kawonayo said he has convened a number of meetings and instructed the Police not to entertain trumped-up charges reported by Mugisha against residents that they are released.

"Many people would be arrested, but I would ensure those few residents who were arrested, charged and committed to Kyenjojo Prison, there was some reasonable evidence brought against them," he argued.

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