

Kitgum youth warned against recruitment by South Sudan rebels

By Wokorach Oboi

Kitgum district authorities have warned residents against alleged recruitment of youth into rebel ranks in the neighbouring South Sudan.

According to the district chairperson, Jackson Omona, the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) is investigating intelligence reports of possible recruitment in the area.

"We have been briefed by the army that because of the situation in South Sudan, some of our young people are being lured and recruited by elements from South Sudan," Omona said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

Jobless youth targeted

The Kitgum resident district commissioner, William Komakech, said the unnamed South Sudan rebel groups were targeting jobless youth in the district.

"There are people who come and deceive the youth that they are recruiting them for jobs in South Sudan, yet they are recruiting them into rebel activities," he said.

The leaders said the alleged recruitment was a "dangerous precedent, which the community needs to be aware of and alert".

Omona and Komakech, however, did not state the number of youth recruited or if the alleged recruitment was taking place in other districts bordering the restless South Sudan.

UPDF unaware

Capt. Lawrence Draku, the UPDF 5th Division spokesperson based at Acholpui in Pader district, said he was not aware of the recruitment.

"Maybe the information was passed at a strategic level. I don't talk on cross-border issues," Capt. Draku

said yesterday, referring *New Vision* to the army spokesperson. However, it was not possible to get a comment from the UPDF spokesperson, Brig. Richard Karemore, by press time.

In a related development, Komakech and Omona also cautioned Ugandans against returning for work or business to the still volatile South Sudan.

Don't go to Juba

"Even if some people deceive you that you will get jobs and earn dollars, first seek clarification. South Sudan is currently unsafe, that is why citizens are fleeing their country into refugee settlement camps here," Komakech said.

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ This is not the first time that claims of rebels fighting in South Sudan are coming up. Just in June, local media reported that quite a number of Ugandans had been recruited by the same rebels. Among those recruited were youth picked from refugee camps.

Their warning comes in the wake of a Ugandan driver who was gunned down on Monday at Torit in South Sudan. Sources said unknown assailants grabbed Kenneth Kilenga from his vehicle and shot him at point blank, killing him instantly.

The deceased had in the past reportedly worked there with Caritas, a humanitarian organisation, but it was not immediately clear if he was still their employee at the time of his gruesome murder.