

Minister orders encroachers to vacate wetland

Eviction. Farmers appealed for more time to harvest their rice.

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KIBUKU. The Minister of Water and Environment, Mr Sam Cheptoris, has given Kibuku farmers up to June to vacate the wetland.

"The ministry and local leaders agreed to give a grace period of six

months to allow farmers harvest their rice and then vacate these wetlands. We shall not allow fresh cultivation and whoever defies this directive will definitely be forced out from the wetland without further notice," Mr Cheptoris warned last Friday.

The Kibuku County MP, Mr Hebert Kinobere, and the district Woman MP, Ms Jennipher Namuyangu, petitioned the Minister for Water and Environment, Mr Cheptoris to in-

tervene with a purpose of allowing farmers to harvest their rice.

Early this month, National Environment Management Authority [Nema] and the police conducted evictions but the farmers appealed for more time to be allowed to harvest their crops.

"We need to protect these wetlands because the current trend of massive destruction has led them [wetlands] to dry up. Also, animals

have nowhere to drink water but because this government is pro- people, we have agreed that farmers be given ample time- at least up to June to harvest their rice," Mr Cheptoris told the cheering farmers.

The Kibuku Resident District Commissioner, Ms Margret Wazikonya, said farmers have destroyed the existing wetland and that cutting down trees has contributed greatly to the current trend of harsh climatic con-

ditions being experienced in many parts of the country.

Mr George Lubega, an official from Nema, said local communities have been sensitised on the dangers of wetland destruction and warned them [farmers] to stop encroaching on the wetlands but people had defied the Nema directive. "This is why we had to enforce the law to begin by arresting them as a stringent measure to deter others," he said.

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