

# Tears, wails as NEMA erases houses, businesses in Lubigi evictions

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**KAMPALA.** Several families were left homeless and businesses destroyed yesterday after the National Environment Management Authority (Nema), backed by security personnel, resumed operations against encroachers on Lubigi wetland, a Kampala neighbourhood.

The enforcement team, working alongside officials from the Ministry of Water and Environment and escorted by police and military personnel, raided Kawaala Cell along the Kampala Northern Bypass and demolished houses, rental units and business structures using tractors.

The operation follows restoration or-

ders issued by Nema in 2024, directing residents occupying the wetland to vacate within 21 days. Although the grace period had elapsed months ago, enforcement had been delayed, leading many residents to believe the exercise had been abandoned.

"I had 20 rental houses, and all have been destroyed. I built those houses from my savings, and everything has been lost in seconds," Ms Flavia Nantume said in tears.

This is the second major crackdown on encroachers in the Lubigi wetland, following a similar operation in May last year that left thousands displaced.

Some residents claimed they had taken the matter to court and were waiting for

a hearing scheduled for June 16 before the demolitions were carried out.

"We were served with a court summons and expected the matter to be handled in court first. We did not expect the demolition team to return before then," one resident said.

However, sources within the enforcement team told the *Daily Monitor* that residents had been warned again last week to vacate voluntarily before the operation commenced.

Among the affected was Mr Sulaiman Ssenyonga, a furniture workshop owner whose structures, including the Emyooga Sacco office for Kawaala carpenters, were demolished.

"Our businesses are gone, and yet bene-

ficiaries still have to repay the Shs70 million Emyooga money that was distributed. Right now, we are stranded," he said.

Residents had erected a large poster bearing President Museveni's image near their offices with the message in Luganda: "*Mzee tutaase ku bibanja byaffe*," loosely translated as "Mzee save our land."

Ms Madina Namyalo, a single mother with eight children and furniture dealer, said the demolition had destroyed the only source of livelihood for her family.

Tension briefly erupted during the exercise after some residents protested the demolitions. Police arrested at least four people as the operation continued.

Mr James Mubiru, the councillor representing the area at Rubaga Division, de-

manded compensation for the affected residents and accused the government of selective enforcement.

In a statement, Nema defended the operation, saying the evictions followed the expiry of the voluntary relocation period granted to encroachers.

"Nema issued restoration orders in accordance with the National Environment Act, Cap 181. It is a criminal offence to settle or develop infrastructure in wetlands without a permit issued in accordance with the law," the statement read in part.

The authority urged all remaining occupants in wetlands to vacate immediately and relocate to safer areas.