

Congolese hijack 18 boats, fishing gear on Lake Albert

KAGADI

By Ismael Kasoooha

Ugandan fishermen are worried over the increasing insecurity perpetuated by Congolese pirates on the waters of Lake Albert.

This follows several incidents where fishermen have lost boats, engines and fishing nets to Congolese fishermen, who claim that Ugandans are trespassing in Congolese waters.

Livingstone Akugizibwe, the Ndaiga sub-county councillor, said in the last one month, 18 boats and engines have been grabbed by suspected Congolese deep into the waters on Lake Albert.

"Congolese authorities are grabbing boat engines and nets from Ugandan fishermen on Ugandan waters, claiming that they are fishing in DR Congo waters. We have reported the

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Suspected Congolese nationals have been reported to confiscate Ugandan fishermen's boats, boat engines and nets on Lake Albert then demand a fee.

matter to district authorities here in Uganda, but nothing has been done," Akugizibwe said.

He said after hijacking a boat and its engine, the pirates demand a ransom of \$1,000 (about sh3.6m) from the owners.

Akugizibwe said such incidents are worrying residents who fish at night and far from the lake shores.

Okech Labu, one of the fishermen, said they are operating under fear and appealed to the Government to

intervene and protect them.

"We do not know what the Congolese are planning against us and even the money they demand for the return of the gears is a lot compared to what we get from the fishing business," Okech said.

He added that: "When the Congolese get Ugandan fishermen on the lake, they claim they have crossed the border yet we (Ugandan fishermen) respect the boundary between the two countries."

The LC3 chairperson for Ndaiga sub-county, Oscar Chunyai, said his office has been getting complaints from fishermen for quite some time and forwarding them to higher authorities.

The Kagadi resident district commissioner Salim Komakech, confirmed that some boats, engines and nets have been grabbed from Ugandan fishermen by



Kitebere landing site in Kagadi district. Fishermen from the site have suffered piracy from DR Congo while fishing at night. Photo by Ismael Kasoooha

suspected Congolese nationals, and as head of security in the district, he has put in place measures to recover the boats, engines and fishing gear.

Komakech said early this month, he intervened in the matter and two boats, two engines, eight nets and some mobile phones were returned by the Congolese.

"We are working with the Ugandan embassy in Kinshasa to ensure that such attacks are prevented or when they occur Ugandan fishermen do not lose their fishing gear," Komakech said.

He appealed to the fishermen to remain calm because their concerns are being handled by the authorities.

In January 2016, suspected Congolese fishermen were reported to have invaded Ugandan waters on Lake Albert after the Government suspended an illegal fisheries enforcement units on the lake. Later a cross-border meeting between government officials was held to resolve the problem.