

Issue. The miners say the Chinese company fraudulently acquired the exploration licence.

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Buhweju miners, investor fight over gold exploration

BUHWEJU. Buhweju Small Scale Miners Association and district leaders are protesting the awarding of the gold exploration licence to a Chinese company.

M/S Hubei Jiu Zhou Geological Exploration Company acquired a three-year licence for the 88.646 km² on December 8, 2016.

Core to their concern, the miners and leaders allege that the Chinese company is owned by directors of another company, Uganda Sino Watson Minerals Company, whose seven-year licence expired last year.

They argue that the law does not allow the same company to acquire another licence in the same area until after three months.

The miners also claim that Sino Watson Minerals Company acquired the licence after disguising as M/S Hubei Jiu Zhou Geological Exploration Company. "There was no change of company other than the name and the licence that was fraudulently awarded. When we applied for the same licence, we were told that it had already been issued out. It was awarded in error and we want it revoked," Mr Mururi Muyambi, one of the local miners said.

Mr Muyambi alleged that for the past seven years the company has been in the district, there is no significant work that has been done.

The 300 artisanal miners under their association claim they are being chased away by the Chinese company over lack of exploration licence.

"They say we are illegal because we do not have a license. We are asking government to legalise our activities because the Chinese despite being authorised, they have done no work. We are ready to invest heavily," Mr Muyambi said.

When contacted, the Buhweju



Site. One of the gold mining sites supervised by local artisanal miners in Katenga Engaju Sub-county, Buhweju District. PHOTO BY FELIX AINEEYOON

cis Mwijukye, said the district leadership has not received any report concerning the presence of the alleged new Chinese company.

"We are expecting Uganda Investment Authority (UIA) to expedite the investigations on how these people got the licence. Local investors benefit our economy, the economy can't grow if there is exploitation," MP Mwijukye warned.

Residents in the area accuse the Chinese workers of concentrating on harvesting *Omulondo*, a herb in Bihanga Forest and exporting it to China.

But M/S Hubei country coordinator, Mr Bob Fu however, denied the allegations and said they did a feasibility study of the area before they were officially given a licence on December 8, 2016.

"We went through the right procedure to acquire this licence. Our equipment is at the site but the challenge is that we cannot access the area because our lives are being threatened

He added: "We have put work to halt as we wait to hear from the government on the next course of action. In Mubende the Energy ministry has taken action, we are waiting for the same to happen in Buhweju."

"We went through the right procedure to acquire this licence. Our equipment is at the site but the challenge is that we cannot access the area because our lives are being threatened by illegal miners,"
MR BOB FU, M/S HUBEI COORDINATOR,

The senior investment executive director at UIA, Ms Prosy Kikabi, said their mandate is to protect both local and foreign investors since they are equally important to the growth of the economy. "The Office of the Prime Minister and that of the President directed us (UIA) to ably find a way of resolving the misunderstanding between residents and Chinese investors," Ms Kikabi said.

She added: "Artisanal miners need help and

ment in mining. The relationship between district leadership and ministry needs to be improved regarding the reporting. We must also go into the implications of these miners getting the certificate."

The assistant commissioner for mines in charge of inspections and monitoring division at the Ministry of Energy, Mr Joseph Okedi, said they investigated the matter and found that the company has not done significant work.

He added that in a March 24, 2017 inspection report, it was revealed that M/S Hubei did not have anything on ground showing their existence apart from the *Omulondo* that they had packed in one of the buildings they had rented. "However, the team established that Ms Hubei Jiu Zhou Geological Exploration Company Limited has never engaged in exploration work but its employees are busy with another lucrative business of harvesting"