

Museveni moves to protect endangered trees

GULU

By Arnest Tumwesige

The continued cutting of trees in the Acholi sub-region has prompted President Yoweri Museveni to order an investigation into the illegal activity.

Desmond Anywar, the climate change officer working with the Refugee Law Project in the northern region, said the activity is carried out by Police officers and political leaders.

While some districts have tried to regulate the activity, Anywar said some of the district forest officers were not well versed with the Forest Regulation Act 2016.

The district council of Gulu came up with a resolution to regulate the exercise, while in Pader district, the council resolved that anyone interested in felling Afzella Africana trees must pay sh1m. In Lamwo district, the activity has been banned since 2017.

Anywar said the move by the President has been timely and that it would unearth a lot of wrongs in different offices.

The activist said during a recent operation carried out in Paloro sub-county, Gulu district that it was discovered that some tree cutters had been

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masquerading as pastoralists and later turning to charcoal burning and cutting timber.

Last week, the President promised to dismiss the chief administrative officers (CAOs), district internal security officers and sub-county and parish chiefs if his team finds out that they had been condoning the activity.

"CAOs are at the level of the permanent secretary of the district and they know how the Government should be run. They are not appointed because of politics, but because



Afzella Africana tree logs that were impounded in May en route to Kampala from Lamwo district. Photo by Arnest Tumwesige

of their expertise," he said.

The suspension, which commenced immediately, has not yielded fruit with the recent impounding of three trailers laden with Afzella Africana trees.

The trucks, purportedly coming from Lamwo district and heading to Kampala, were intercepted in Gulu district at the beginning of May.

John Komakech Ogwok, the Lamwo LC5 chairperson, said the intervention by the

President should have been earlier. He said as local leaders, it was hard for them to prevail over the situation.

"Those involved in the vice are powerful people and they are rich. They compromise the land owners and the Police with peanuts, yet they are the people supposed to enforce the ban," he said.

Komakech also said he had tried to engage the LC1 chairpersons by warning them against signing any

letter authoring tree cutting in Lamwo district.

The chairperson, however, said for any intended operation by the Government, the army should be at the forefront, other than the Police.

In Lamwo district, about 20 trucks carrying charcoal, timber and logs leave the district on a monthly basis. The most affected sub-counties are Padibe West, Lukung which is close to South Sudan and Ogili.

■ The Afzella Africana, commonly known as Afzella or Beyo, is an African mahogany. It is a large, deciduous tree with an open crown. It can grow 10-25 metres tall. The bole can be up to 40cm in diameters. The wood is considered to be of good quality. They contain about 27% crude proteins, 33% crude carbohydrates and 18% of the seed dry weight is oil. It is often exported to Europe. The seeds of the tree are being investigated for their usefulness in providing seed flour and seed oil.



Afzella Africana

AFZELLA AFRICANA