



Nabbanja (right) handing over sh5m to one family member to support burial arrangements, in Kyaleni village, Kagadi district, on Friday

RIVER NGUSI BOAT ACCIDENT VICTIMS' SEARCH CONTINUES

By Andrew Musinguzi

The Albertine Marine Police has so far retrieved 10 bodies from River Ngusi following a fatal boat accident in Kyaleni village, Kagadi district, in which 30 people were confirmed dead after a canoe capsized.

The tragic incident happened on April 28, when 41 charcoal burners travelling with bags of charcoal aboard a locally made canoe reportedly set off from Bugoma Central Forest Reserve in Kikuube district, heading to Pacwa Town Council in Kagadi district.

Police said the boat capsized while crossing River Ngusi in Kyaleni village, leaving 30 dead, while 11 survivors were rushed to different health centres for treatment.

Some of the deceased have since been identified, including Kacenge Musinguzi, 24; Kahigwa Mwesigwa, 28; Ahebwa Gumisiriza, 25; Omuhereza Tumusiime, 32; Thomas Byaruhanga, 26 and Robert Tugume, 24, among others still missing.

Marine experts, working together with Albertine Police, have since Tuesday continued searching River Ngusi and parts of the Lake Albert shoreline for the missing victims.

"We are continuing to search for more 20 bodies from the corners of the river. The search is being conducted by the marine experts together with police and residents who are well conversant with the place," Sulaiman Kirungi, the commander of Marine Police in Uganda, said.

Kirungi condemned the continued illegal activities in Bugoma Central Forest Reserve and called for stronger collaboration among local authorities, the National Forestry Authority (NFA) and police to curb the vice.

He also blamed overloading and failure by passengers to wear life jackets while using

water transport means.

LOCALS SPEAK OUT

Robert Kasija, 29, one of the survivors, told *New Vision* that they were returning from burning charcoal in Bugoma Central Forest Reserve.

The cause of the tragedy was due to overloading and reduced visibility. We were using big torches for lighting and shortly after starting the journey, it started raining, interrupting our movement. I managed to survive because I know how to swim," Kasija said.

"I wanted to postpone the journey because it was too late and I somehow feared what I saw many charcoal burners interested in travelling home amidst many sacks of charcoal, but I risked it with worries; little did I know it was the end of us," Tumuhairwe Byaruhanga, 27, another survivor, narrated.

Leaders who visited the accident scene blamed the NFA for what they described as a failure to adequately protect Bugoma Central Forest Reserve, resulting in continued illegal charcoal burning and forest destruction.

Yosia Ndiwami, the Kagadi chairperson, said if people had not been accessing the forest illegally, the accident might not have happened.

Ndiwami noted that some of those who were on the boat had come from far areas, including eastern Uganda, which could complicate the identification of the victims.

Justus Businge, the Pacwa Town Council chairperson, said encroachment on gazetted areas, including forest reserves and wetlands in Kagadi, Kibaale, Kikuube and Hoima districts, had become rampant.

He called on NFA and the environment police to intensify monitoring and supervision of protected areas and apprehend suspected encroachers.