

NEMA stops Britania from constructing on city wetland

By Betty Amamukirori

The executive director of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Tom Okurut, has told the commission of inquiry into land matters that the authority has stopped Britania Allied Industries, a foods and beverages company, from building an apartment on the Nakivubo Channel wetland.

Britania, according to the information from the commission, has a title of seven-and-a-half acres of land on the wetland. The title is owned by Majestic Commodities, a company believed to be part of Britania.

Okurut on Wednesday told the commission, led by Mary Oduka Ochan, who was standing in for Justice Catherine Bamugemereire, that the company acquired the permit to develop the area in 2011, following a visit by the Cabinet policy committee on environment, which is chaired by the Prime Minister.

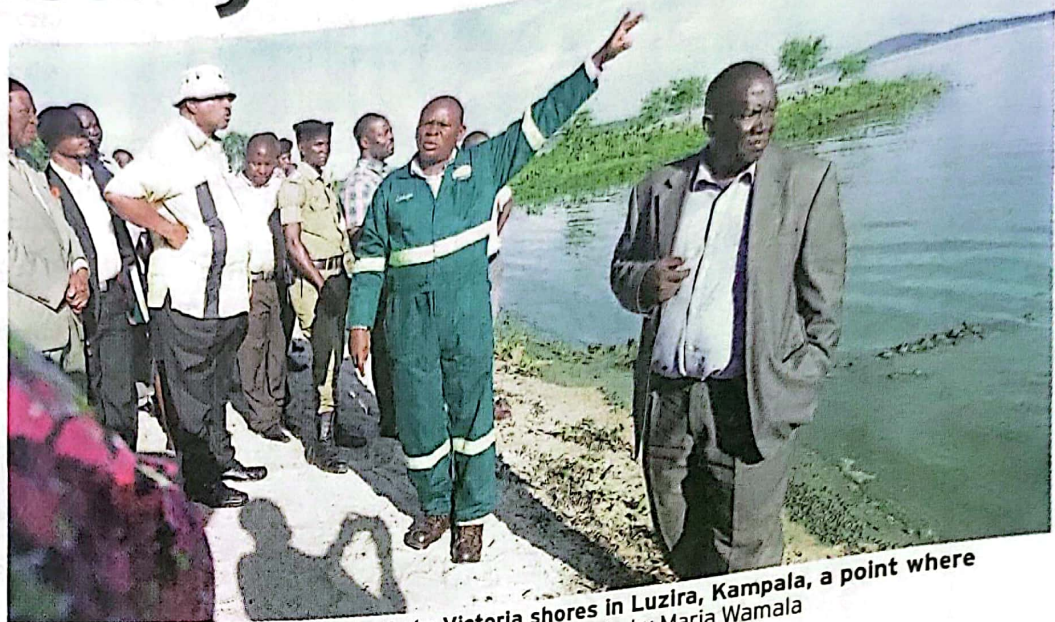
The visit was prompted by a complaint that had earlier been filed by NEMA and some investors who wanted permission to acquire titles on the wetland.

Okurut, who was responding to questions from the commissioners and their counsels in regards to land ownership in the wetlands, said after the visit, they discovered that there were over 642 titles in wetlands around Kampala, out of which only 20 were got before 1995.

He stated that upon the findings, the committee ordered for the cancellation of all titles got after 1995 and those got before 1995 were to be regulated on how to use the land.

He said upon cancellation of titles, Majestic Commodities came with a newer title on the land, claiming that it was a generic title got from subdivisions done on the land which had an older title.

He stated that after the decision of the committee, the company was granted a permit to use the land.



The land probe commissioners visiting Lake Victoria shores in Luzira, Kampala, a point where Nakivubo Channel connects to the lake. Right is Okurut. Photo by Maria Wamala

George Lubega, NEMA's natural resources manager, told the commission that the permit was for the construction of an apartment and warehouses on the land and was pending clearance from Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA).

Asked by Ochan why they would allow such a development on the wetland, Okurut said they stopped the company midway when they had started grading the land because their plans were not consistent with the law on wetland use.

He noted that their regulations on wetland use only requires developers to use it for green space, development of roads, fish farming and other farming activities, such as rice farming, noting that this is to ensure that the hydrology of the ecosystem is preserved.

The commission also visited Kitintale and Miami Beach, Luzira, where city

wastes pour into Lake Victoria.

Okurut reported that because of the reclamation of the wetlands and population increase in the urban area, dangerous wastes are emptied into the lake and, over time, it has caused a sludge build-up, which has in turn killed the aquatic life in the area.

According to him, the former Member of Parliament Henry Banyenzaki, who had bought the land to develop it into a beach, had to abandon it partly due to the sludge.

"Due to population increase in the city, the wetlands can no longer manage to filter the waste. So it all pours into the lake," Okurut said.

He explained that the sludge has reduced the depth profile of Port Bell from eight to six meters.

When asked what they are doing to save further damage of the water body, he said they are in talks with KCCA to see that the Nakivubo channel is

blocked, to let the waste flow on a strip of the wetland before it finally goes to the lake.

He said by doing this, the wetlands will filter the waste and retain the water for long before pouring into the lake, adding that they are also planning to remove the sludge from the lake, but do not have the finances.

His revelations related the probe team who looked at it as killing two birds with one stone. Commissioner Joy Gunze Habaasa said if the proposed interventions are implemented, the land owners on the wetland will evict themselves and the aquatic life will be saved.

However, Okurut said if the channel is blocked, the city might flood, since the waste will be taking long to pour into the lake. UBC is among the title owners likely to be evicted if the proposals are implemented.