

Govt speaks out on refugee kidnap case

By David Lumu
and Simon Masaba

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has denied links to a racket of security operatives who kidnap refugees and hand them over to their home countries' authorities for money.

"OPM officials have no hand and linkage to the cases of abduction in question. To the contrary, OPM officials have tirelessly worked with relevant arms of government to offer protection to the refugees, especially the Uganda Police Force and Internal Security Organisation in refugee settlements and urban refugee areas," David Apollo Kazungu, the commissioner for refugees, said.

New Vision broke the story of how senior Police officers allegedly connive with OPM officials to abduct refugees fleeing neighbouring countries for political persecution, in exchange for money.

The refugees, who have spoken to *New Vision* on condition of anonymity, allege that there is a network of government officials and Police officers involved in arresting asylum seekers and surrendering them to

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Two senior Police commanders — Joel Aguma and Nixon Agasiirwe — were among nine people charged before the general court martial over kidnapping and handing over to the Rwandan government Lt Joel Mutabazi, a former bodyguard of President

Paul Kagame in 2013.

However, Kazungu said in a statement to *New Vision* that the kidnap of Mutabazi should be squarely blamed on individual Police officers.

"The Mutabazi case is an isolated incident, which seems to have been mismanaged by individual Police officers," he said.

Mutabazi sought asylum in Uganda in 2011 and was granted refugee status.

The refugees, who spoke to *New Vision*, said the covert operations of abducting refugees are still going on. The refugees implicated senior refugee officials in OPM, and senior Police commanders in the arrest and repatriation of asylum seekers.

The refugees listed a number of their colleagues who are reportedly feared dead. They claim others are thought to have been kidnapped and their whereabouts are not known.

The victims include Gerome Ndagizimana (shot in Kabalagala in 2011), Charles Ingabirwe, a journalist killed in Bukasa, Sgt Dominic Sabagasha (missing), Capt. Sunday and Pastor Christopher Buzige (missing).

They alleged that Capt. Charles Sibo, an asylum



Aguma, Agasiirwe and others arrive at the general court martial in Makindye Kampala last Friday

seeker, was charged and sentenced to three years in jail, but he refused to exit prison at the end of his sentence out of fear that he would be handed over to authorities in his home country. This has not been confirmed by prison authorities.

They also claimed that Habib Mudasiru, a senior Police officer from one of the countries in the East African region, was "rescued" from Police by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and now lives under protection in Uganda.

They claimed that Mutabazi was kidnapped together with another asylum seeker — Innocent Kaliisa — whose whereabouts is not known.

Nakivale refugee shooting

In the statement to *New Vision*, Kazungu has also revealed that one suspect, John Claude Habayimana, has been arrested over a recent shooting incident at Nakivale refugee settlement camp.

New Vision on Tuesday reported an attack on the refugee settlement camp by mysterious armed men who shot one person dead and injured five others.

According to Kazungu, preliminary Police investigations are pointing to a robbery.

"The Nakivale refugee settlement shooting incident is under investigation by the Police, but primary findings indicate it was a robbery, on

a one Augustine Muhizi, a Rwandan resident in Juru Zone, Nakivale, who is a businessman dealing in agricultural produce. Muhizi claims to have lost sh38m during the attack," he said.

"Some arrests have been made, namely a one John Claude Habayimana, a neighbour, who is suspected to have guided the robbers. Investigations are still ongoing," he said.

Yesterday, the regional Police commander for Rwizi, Robert Walugembe, confirmed the arrest of the suspect.

"It was not an attack on the refugee camp, but rather a robbery along the road that goes through the refugee camp," he said.