

# Dubious scholarship plot foiled

BY JOHN THAWITE

AUTHORITIES in Kasese municipality have intercepted a plot under which a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) had started mobilising hundreds of children for scholarships by an unknown foreign agency.

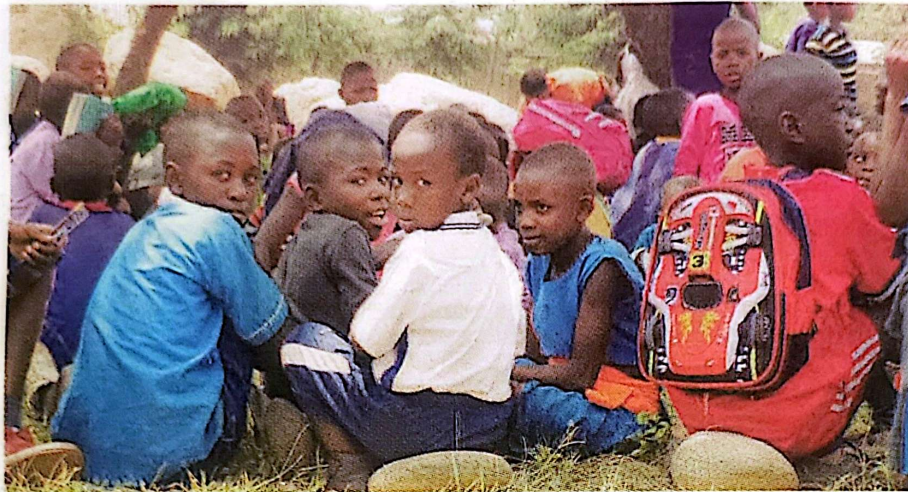
The children (400), some aged below six, were found at Kasese High School on Wednesday where they were being poorly accommodated and badly fed as they awaited the alleged sponsorship.

They were being held at Kasese Junior Primary School and Kasese High School, but operating under the auspices of another institution, Heroes International Secondary and University.

Preliminary investigations by the Police show the children were from various parts of the country, including Mbarara, Bundibugyo, Isingiro, Ntoroko and Kabarole.

## Authorities take action

Learning of the racket, the Kasese municipal education officer, Lawrence Turuganya, backed by the Police, moved in and ordered the school and the NGO directors, Fom Mugume and Pastor John Ahebwa to close. Ahebwa owns a Pentecostal church in Kasese



Some of the children who were at the school. Photo by John Thawite

town. He also owns a company, Heroes International Ltd, which has now been changed to Heroes International Primary, Secondary and University.

Turuganya also directed the two directors to ensure that they send the children back to their homes, until the school term starts on Monday.

Addressing the pupils, parents and some teachers at the school premises, Turuganya said the municipal authority had never registered the school for kindergarten.

"Those of you who are below six years are not supposed to be here. Go and look for official

kindergartens.

"The rest of you should return on Monday. If I find you here after 6:00pm, I will hand you over to the Police," he said on Wednesday.

## Appalling conditions

Turuganya also revealed that the school lacked pit-latrines, water and electricity, thus endangering the lives of the children.

## Directors grilled

During a brief meeting shortly after the directive, the Kasese municipal enforcement officer, Joseph Basaliza, faulted the

management of Kasese High School for allowing Heroes International Secondary and University, which claims to be a community-based organisation, to operate within the premises.

"You are doing something wrong. How do you tell us that you have a primary, secondary and university and you have no campus?" Basaliza asked Ahebwa.

## Apologies

Fom Mugume, the director of Kasese High School, said when Ahebwa approached him to host the children, he did not know that the NGO operated

under another name.

"It is an error. We are sorry. I apologise for and on behalf of the team. But when it comes with secondary, university I think it was an error and we apologise," Mugume said.

Ahebwa admitted to having erred and apologised. "I have a company which is Heroes International Company Ltd. I made a mistake when I used the title for this NGO," Ahebwa said.

The Rwenzori East Regional Police commander (RPC), Julius Caesar Tusingwire, said Mugume and Ahebwa had reported to Kasese Police headquarters to make statements over the matter. By press time, they were still being held by the Police.

According to the RPC, the suspects have been taking photos of the children and sending them to yet to be identified donors for funding.

## Background

Several children have in the past been rescued from suspected traffickers under similar circumstances. In 2015, 24 children were rescued from suspected terror cells as they were being indoctrinated by suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels into radical Islam, the Police said.

In 2013 and 2014, some 40

children were rescued from suspected ADF cells. The Police said the children were recruited under the guise of offering sponsorships for study.

## Children rescued in Gulu

In 2014, in Gulu district, 36 school children were rescued by the Police from a suspected child trafficker who was transporting them to Kampala after promising to give them scholarships.

The Police said the trafficker was a director in one of the schools in Wakiso district. The suspect claimed he was taking the children to the school but did not know the school's registration number and had no contact of any of the teachers.

## Mbale incident

Another 34 pupils were also rescued by the Police in Mbale district in 2015. According to the Police, the children were being confined in a house under the pretext of teaching them religion. The children had been collected from the districts of Sironko, Bulambuli and Mbale and were being taught a rare Islamic gospel. One of the teachers of the children said they did not believe in other forms of educating the children through public school.

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