

Directive

Implement

Mandate

Order

MPs ask NEMA to enforce 'kaveera' ban

By Moses Mulondo

The parliamentary committee on natural resources has directed the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to resume enforcement of the *kaveera* (polythene bags) ban.

The committee made the unanimous decision yesterday, while meeting a team of NEMA officials, led by the executive director, Tom Okurut.

The MPs unanimously made the resolution after Okurut had informed them that they had received a letter from President Yoweri Museveni, asking them to review the ban, arguing it was affecting some investors.

The committee summoned NEMA to, among other queries, explain why it is not enforcing the ban on *kaveera*, yet the law banning it is still in force.

Bukoto East Member of Parliament (MP) Florence Namayanja asked Okurut to clarify whether the letter from the President was directing them to stop enforcing the ban.

Okurut noted that the President had not directed them to stop the enforcement, but had advised them to review the policy on the ban.

Okurut had earlier told the committee that since NEMA is a government agency, they could not stand in the way of the Government, following the letter from the President. He said they had decided to halt enforcing the ban and concentrate on education and sensitisation of the public against using *kaveera*.

The NEMA boss also revealed that the President's letter was based on a report from meetings, which involved the trade and industry ministry, the water and environment ministry, agriculture ministry, Uganda Revenue Authority, Kampala Capital City



Okurut appearing before the parliamentary natural resources committee yesterday. Photo by Kennedy Oryema

ON THE GROUND

■ Tom Okurut, the executive director of the National Environment Management Authority, said following messages from Uganda Manufacturers Association that the ban had been lifted, there is now a resurgence of polythene bags, which are flooding the market.

Authority and the finance ministry, which co-ordinated the process.

Okurut, however, argued that after carefully studying the report, they discovered that the President had been

given wrong information. He said, the manufacturers of plastics don't only produce polythene bags.

Okurut said following messages from Uganda Manufacturers Association that the ban had been lifted, there is now a resurgence of polythene bags, which are flooding the market. He noted that all the gains that had been made in the fight against the use of polythene have been reversed. In response to Okurut's comments, Dodoth East County MP Samson Lokeris (NRM) said: "I don't understand the excuse by these people. If the law is in place and it has not been changed, why don't you implement it? If you are not ready to execute your mandate, why don't you resign?"

"Is the President's directive advice or law? As a committee, we have to resolve that NEMA should implement the ban. We are ready to face the President and explain to him why he shouldn't be the one to fail the implementation of the ban," Namayanja said.

Buliisa district Woman MP Norah Bigirwa (NRM) said: "It seems there is conflict of interest by some individuals in the Government. If we are concerned about the lives of Ugandans, we shouldn't accept compromises because there are individuals profiteering in what was banned."

Kyankwanzi Woman MP Eng. Anne Maria Nankabirwa (NRM), narrated how in the ninth Parliament, legislators had overwhelmingly supported the ban and assured NEMA that even if the law is returned for review, Parliament would not accept it.

"Failing to enforce the ban would be undermining Parliament. As a country, we lose so much in environmental degradation. We are losing a lot of money due to high incidents of cancer," Nankabirwa argued.

Jinja Municipality East MP Nathan Igeme Nabeta (NRM) said, "Let NEMA implement the ban. If they refuse to implement it, we shall ask them to put it in writing and discuss in Parliament how to deal with them."

The committee members expressed support for NEMA to resume implementation of the ban. The committee deputy chairperson and Kiboga East MP Dr Kefa Kiwanuka (NRM), who chaired the meeting, said: "Our message, which we have sent out from these deliberations as a committee, is loud and clear. We want NEMA to resume implementing the law."

- In the 2008/2009 financial year, the East African Community member states made a joint decision to ban the manufacture, importation and use of plastic carrier bags of less than 30 microns.
- In 2009, Parliament enacted the Finance Act (2009) prohibiting the importation, manufacture, sale and use of plastic bags of less than 30 microns.
- In 2012, in a case against the ban filed by Greenwatch against NEMA and the Attorney General, court maintained the ban.
- In August 2015, Cabinet passed a resolution to maintain the ban.
- On January 27, 2016, the Uganda Plastics Manufacturers and Recyclers Association filed a suit against the enforcement of the ban by NEMA and even obtained an interim order but the order was vacated on May 30, 2016 and the application dismissed by court in favour of NEMA.
- On March 13 last year, President Yoweri Museveni directed that the current law be reviewed to save the investments by the private investors.

BACKGROUND TO THE BAN