

Acholi chiefs stoned over sugar factory land saga

Angered. The cultural leaders were briefing residents about their recent meeting with the Lands minister where they reportedly agreed to give the disputed land for establishing a sugar factory.

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AMURU. Three cultural leaders in Amuru District yesterday survived being lynched by residents who turned rowdy and pelted them with stones over allegations that they endorsed the giveaway of 10,000 hectares of land to Madhvani Group of Companies for a sugar factory.

Mr John Otto Arop, the chief of Pamuca clan, Mr Faustino Okello from Toro clan and Mr Denis Atwom Opiyo, the clan leader of Pagak, were attacked during a meeting at Te Okutu market in Kololo village, Amuru Sub-county.

The cultural leaders were giving reports of last month's meeting they had with the Lands minister Betty Amongi in which

they reportedly reached an understanding on giving the disputed land for establishment of a sugar factory.

But their meeting was cut short when the residents turned violent and started pelting them with stones, forcing the cultural leaders to flee.

The Amuru Sub-county chairperson, Mr David Ochira, confirmed the incident to *Daily Monitor* in an interview on Thursday.

"I got reports that residents threw stones at the cultural leaders in anger over the matters surrounding the sugar factory land. They were only saved by the police who intervened," Mr Achire said.

He noted that the residents were provoked by the reports the cultural leaders gave that indicated some land owners had

agreed to give away their land for the sugar factory establishment.

Mr Michael Lakony, the Amuru District chairperson, when contacted, regretted the action of the residents.

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He, however, blamed the cultural chiefs over what he described as "greedy move to betray the residents in Amuru District by trading their land to the government minus their consent".

"These cultural chiefs acted on their own behalf and went to the government to sign giveaway of land without the knowledge of the residents. Do they expect to be welcomed with open arms

when they come back to talk to the same residents they betrayed?" Mr Lakony asked.

Mr Lakony alleged that the cultural leaders are being used by the government to acquire the land in Kololo against the residents' will because they struck deals with the government.

When contacted, the clan leader of Toro Rwot Okello refuted the allegations that they struck deals with the government to give away land for the establishment of the sugar factory.

Rwot Okello said the land in question had already been given away by the Amuru District land board.

"We cannot sign any agreement over land that is not ours, our meeting with Ms Amongi was on issues of compensation to affected community and need for the government to turn the contested land from public into customary land," Rwot Okello told *Daily Monitor*.