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Govt gives developer disputed land



Explanation. Commissioner John Fisher Kasenge addresses Alebtong residents at Awel Market last Friday. PHOTO BY ISAAC OTWII

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Divisions. Whereas the project is aimed at developing the area, residents are still divided over ownership.

BY ISAAC OTWII
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ALEBTONG. Uganda Land Commission (ULC) has offered a third of 955 hectares of disputed land to investors planning to construct a tertiary institution in Alebtong District.

The Commission said the vast government land in Awei Sub-county will be shared between the community, the district and those planning to establish a tertiary institution to be named Alebtong University of Science and Technology.

Mr John Fisher Kasenge, the Commissioner at ULC, said although the developer had been "unfriendly" to the sitting tenants in the approach, they wanted the land for development.

"By the time we came here, we didn't know where the land is. We didn't know what is on this contested land, we didn't even know the size but as I talk now, we are halfway gathering the facts we need about this land,"

he told residents at Awei Market last Friday.

However, for both the district and the community to benefit from the Adero Quarantine land, they will have to apply to the Commission within three months, according to Kasenge said.

Since 2014, the university and the community of Opuc Village have been caught up in a land wrangle involving 2,045 hectares of public land.

Vision bearer

The Alebtong District chairman, Mr Denis Johnson Okello, said Prof William Boto, a son of the soil, was the brain behind the establishment of the proposed university.

The institution was to be constructed on part of Adero Forest Reserve, which falls under the control of National Forest Authority (NFA) and Adero Quarantine- also a government land.

Around March last year, Mr Okello said he invited Prof Boto to his office as he sought updates on the university project.

Thereafter the professor was allocated an office space in the Planning Unit of the district.

DISPUTE

Since 2014, the university and the community of Opuc Village have been caught up in a land wrangle involving 2,045 hectares of public land.

But the area MPs told their voters not to allow anybody claiming to be a developer to utilise the land.

According to Mr Okello, Prof Boto allegedly disappeared around that period when the district executive wanted them to speed up the process of setting up the university.

Mr Okello claimed Prof Boto's team later took graders to Adero Quarantine and started uprooting trees before destroying people's crops planted there.

He claimed more than 500 hectares of crops were destroyed by the team.

"They started ploughing down people's crops and replacing them with their maize. They have now planted maize without the consent of the district,"

the Alebtong LC5 chairman claimed.

"The project team claimed that they were dealing with power from above. But after being squeezed to the wall by the police, they withdrew from the loose talk that President Yoweri Museveni had authorised them to utilise the land," Mr Okello said.

Minister has no authority

The district chairman claimed that a commissioner from the ministry of Lands was aware of the foul play in the entire process of acquiring the land for the project.

The Commissioner explained that the minister does not have the authority to answer questions regarding the said land except ULC.

But the government decision to offer the disputed land to the developer appears to have left members of the community divided.

"The idea of dividing the land to all the conflicting parties is good rather than taking everything away from the community, Mr Stephen Ogwok, a resident of Opac village, said.