

pressure on the forest called for gov- while calling on local communities and tion efforts," Mr Opio said.

BY JAMES OWICH

Govt moves to fast-track inquiry into Apaa land row

AMURU. The government will allocate funds in the next financial year to facilitate the work of the commission of inquiry established by President Museveni to resolve the long-standing Apaa land conflict, State Minister for Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Kenneth Omona has said.

Dr Omona said the lack of funding had slowed the work of the commission, which was set up to investigate the root causes of violence in the disputed area and recommend a lasting solution.

Addressing residents of Andara Village in Labala Parish, Pabbo Sub-county, Amuru District, at the weekend, the minister said government remained committed to ending the conflict that has claimed lives, displaced families, and destroyed property over the years.

"The work of the commission of inquiry set up by President Museveni to resolve the Apaa land question has

been delayed by lack of funds. The President believes the problem will be resolved through the work of the commission, which will inquire deeper into the issues and find a lasting solution," Dr Omona said.

He added that the funds would be made available in the next financial year to enable the commission to execute its mandate.

The five-member commission is chaired by former Chief Justice Bart Katureebe.

Dr Omona said government's immediate priority was to restore peace and security in the disputed area so that residents can resume normal life and engage in productive activities.

"The government has the responsibility to protect its citizens and their property. We want peace in Apaa so that communities can engage in develop-

STALLED EFFORTS

Despite heavy deployment of security forces in the contested area since 2012, violence has persisted. Previous attempts to resolve the conflict, including a 2016 parliamentary inquiry and a mediation committee led by former Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda and former Speaker Jacob Oulanyah, failed to produce a lasting solution.

ment activities and improve their living conditions," he said.

He urged residents to shun violence and focus on agriculture to improve food security and household incomes.

"People in Apaa should live in harmo-

ny. Stop these killings and violence," he added. Apaa, a disputed strip of land measuring about 42 square kilometres along the eastern bank of River Nile, has for years been a flashpoint of violence between the Acholi and Madi communities.

The area lies between Amuru District in Acholi Sub-region and Adjumani District in West Nile Sub-region, with both ethnic groups claiming ancestral ownership.

The conflict has resulted in the deaths of at least 40 people, destruction of property, and closure of schools and health facilities.

The latest attack occurred late last month when armed assailants wielding machetes, bows and arrows reportedly attacked the area and killed three people.

The dispute dates back to 2011 follow-

ing the eviction of thousands of households by security agencies. In April 2015, elderly women staged a nude protest against planned evictions from the contested land.

The land is also claimed by the National Forestry Authority as a gazetted forest reserve, while the Uganda Wildlife Authority says it forms part of East Madi Game Reserve.

Mr David Onok Atunya, an 85-year-old resident of Apaa, suggested that granting the area district status could help end the conflict.

"The only way to resolve the current problem is to give Apaa district status so that it becomes independent of both Amuru and Adjumani," he said.

Two weeks ago, religious leaders from Acholi Sub-region issued a joint statement urging communities in the area to embrace peace and coexistence.