DEMOLITION DESTROYED PUBLIC TOILETS USED BY TRADERS

OWINO MARKET TRADERS DEMAND COMPENSATION

PHOTO BY HANNINGTON NKALUBO



Mugenyi (left), a trader, together with fellow traders and leaders in St Balikuddembe (Owino) Market, stands in front of the lock-up structure that was demolished by businessman Hamis Kiggundu

By Moses Kigongo

Traders who lost property during the recent demolition of structures around St Balikuddembe Market in Kampala are demanding compensation, accusing city businessman Hamis Kiggundu of destroying their businesses without due process.

The demolition, which was carried out on Saturday night by workers linked to Kiggundu's Ham Enterprises, targeted structures along the Nakivubo Channel, where a redevelopment project is underway. The operation left several traders counting losses after their stalls, lock-ups and merchandise were destroyed.

TRADERS CRY FOUL

According to affected vendors, the demolished structures housed shops, produce stores and lock-ups that many traders relied on for a living. The buildings also acted as a perimeter barrier that protected St Balikuddembe Market vendors' merchandise from theft.

The demolition also destroyed one of the main public toilets used by traders, as well as another privately-owned facility belonging to businessman Festus Kasajja. The traders said the facilities were crucial, given the large number of vendors operating within the market.

The demolition was later halted by Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) executive director Hajjat Sharifah Buzeki, who reportedly cited irregularities, including the failure by the developers to obtain a demolition permit from the city authority.

Despite claims from Kiggundu's camp that affected traders were compensated, several vendors insist they never received any payment.

TRADERS COUNT LOSSES

Mariam Tomusange, a produce vendor, said she lost 15 bags of beans and a weighing scale valued at more than sh7m.

"I am currently sitting at my former stall with no means of earning money to take care of my family. This business was the sole source of my livelihood," Tomusange said.

She challenged Kiggundu's team to present a verifiable list of people who were compensated so that both the public and market leadership can confirm the claims.

Another trader, Willy Mukasa, who deals in groundnuts, said he lost 16 bags of groundnuts worth nearly sh8m after his lock-up was destroyed.

"I had bought the ground nuts for a customer and I was expecting to earn a commission. After the demolition, everything was stolen. I have lost the business, the lock-up and my customer," Mukasa said.

He added that he now faces difficulty replacing the stock, especially at a time when his children have just returned to school.

Mukasa said prior to the demolition, agents linked to Kiggundu approached traders with a proposal to relocate them temporarily.

He said the traders were offered about sh25m collectively to vacate the area and pave way for new structures that were to be built. They were reportedly told that they would be given space on the new structures.

However, Mukasa and several colleagues declined the offer, saying there were no guarantees they would be allowed back after redevelopment.

"We feared that the money offered was too little compared to the value of our businesses and the stock we had invested over the years," he said.

PROPERTY OWNERS AFFECTED

Some property owners also say their structures were destroyed without their consent.

Jjunju Edward, one of the landlords in the area, said Kiggundu had previously expressed interest in acquiring the property and approached several landlords, including John Baptist Kivumbi, who owned one of the major structures that was demolished.

According to Jjunju, Kivumbi declined the proposal because the property is part of an ongoing court case. "We were shocked to receive calls that our premises were being demolished. Right now, our only option is to return to court and seek justice," Jjunju said.

Another trader, Robert Mugenyi, who deals in cow-peas, rice and groundnuts, said he lost 30 bags of groundnuts valued at more than sh15m.

"We worked hard during our youthful years to build these businesses," he said. "We are responsible people who survive through our own work. All we want is to restore our businesses, not sympathy."

HAMIS KIGGUNDU'S POSITION

Speaking to the press earlier this week, Hamis Kiggundu maintained that all traders operating within the affected area were compensated.

He also denied demolishing part of St Balikuddembe Market, stating that the operation was meant to clear sections of the Nakivubo Channel, where he says he holds development and demolition permits for redevelopment works.

AUTHORITIES RESPOND

Efforts to obtain further comment from KCCA spokesperson Daniel NuweAbine were unsuccessful at the time of publication. However, he previously told the media that the matter had been handed over to the Police for investigation.

Police spokesperson Luke Owoyesigyire confirmed that investigations into the incident are ongoing.

Meanwhile, the Police also reported the discovery of a body near the demolished area on Monday evening. Authorities said the body had not yet been identified due to its condition at the time of recovery.

The demolition comes days after arcade traders in downtown Kampala lost merchandise to floods that were reportedly caused by Ham's structure that was constructed on top of Nakivubo Channel.

The new building is said to have blocked run-off water that used to flow into Nakivubo, resulting in floods that swept across city buildings and roads last week.

ABOUT ST BALIKUDDEMBE MARKET

St Balikuddembe Market, popularly known as Owino Market, is one of Uganda's largest and busiest trading hubs. Located in the heart of Kampala, the market accommodates tens of thousands of traders dealing in produce, textiles, electronics, footwear and household goods.

The market plays a critical role in Uganda's informal economy, serving as a major distribution point for goods coming from rural farming communities and cross-border trade routes. It also provides employment and livelihoods for thousands of families across the country.

Because of its strategic location near Nakivubo Channel, the area has long been affected by flooding and drainage challenges, prompting periodic redevelopment plans aimed at improving drainage infrastructure and modernising the surrounding commercial environment.

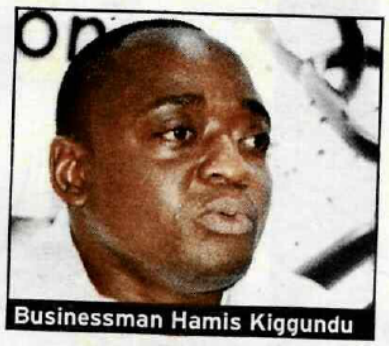
COMPENSATED TRADERS SPEAK OUT

Muhammad Lukwago, the chairperson of the Kasode Zone along Nakivubo Channel, confirmed that some traders did receive compensation. According to Lukwago, he approached Kiggundu's office after hearing rumours about the planned demolition.

"After some time, I was contacted by members of his team and asked to compile a list of traders operating in the area who were willing to accept compensation," he explained.

Lukwago said some traders refused the offer, insisting they would only leave through a court order. "I registered only those who accepted the compensation and left out those who declined," Lukwago said. He added that everyone who appeared on the list was paid, except for a few traders who were mistakenly left out but are expected to be compensated.

Another trader, Robert Mukalazi, believes the current dispute stems partly from long-standing landlord-tenant conflicts within the market. According to him, following previous government directives that removed landlords from markets, many tenants took over operational control of stalls.



Businessman Hamis Kiggundu



Trader Mariam Tomusange