

DR Congo authorities refuse to hand over 12 Ugandans

NEBBI

By Benedict Okethwengu

Congolese authorities have said they will not hand over the 12 Ugandans in their detention before negotiating with Kampala.

The Ugandans were arrested last week, following clashes involving bodaboda cyclists from Nebbi district and residents of Mahagi in eastern DR Congo.

Henry Jakisa, the chairperson of Goli Custom Bodaboda Association in Nebbi, identified the detained Ugandans as James Odongo, Douglas Ukecha, Albert Uyirwoth, Ronald Nyipir and Denis Ajolorwoth, all residents of Goli.

Others are Malobi Uyirwoth, Abdul Karim and Jakuma Kizito, whose motorcycles were impounded; Wanok Kizito, Gladys Wanok, Moses

Owachgiu, Patrick Ocaya, Raymond Unyutha, Wilfred Okethwengu, all residents of Nebbi town.

Jakisa said the men were arrested during a scuffle to recover a motorcycle of their colleague, which was impounded two weeks ago following an accident in DR Congo.

He said after the accident, residents intervened and demanded sh350,000 from the motorist, but because he did not have the money, he left the motorcycle behind.

Jakisa added that the men were beaten and during the fracas, 14 of their motorcycles and money worth sh2.3m were confiscated from them by Congolese authorities.

Jakisa added that two of the men who were beaten and taken to hospital have escaped and their whereabouts are unknown.

On Tuesday, a Ugandan delegation led by Bessie Ajilong, the Nebbi

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The relationship between the two neighbouring countries has been volatile, with accusations ranging from harassment and border encroachment on the lake and land by each party, despite the existence of a bilateral agreement between the two nations.

resident district commissioner went to Mahagi to secure the release of the Ugandans, but their pleas were rejected.

The authorities, however, allowed the delegation to visit Mahagi Police Station, where 15 cyclists are being detained.

According to Jakisa, the authorities

have not been providing their suspects with food.

He said they have been working with their counterparts in Mahagi to deliver food for the detained Ugandans.

Sources say during the negotiation, all appeared well, until a phone call came in the middle of discussion, stopping Adel Alingi Mokuba, the district commissioner for Mahagi territory, from releasing the cyclists.

It is said the call came from the governor of Ituri province, Jefferson Abdullah, who ordered that the Ugandans could only be released after a negotiation between Kampala and Kinshasa had taken place.

Earlier, Cresphas Sate, the immigration officer at Mahagi border, had also demanded that the delegation proves that the arrested men were cyclists.

Ajilong said the Mahagi administration has asked for more

time and negotiation with authorities in Kampala before the cyclists are released.

She also said the Congolese are also holding the men in protest over the alleged arrest of one of their ministers in Kampala over a traffic-related offense.

New Vision could not however verify the claim of the arrest of the minister. Ajilong urged the Congolese to treat the Ugandans with dignity, saying the issue of human rights is universal.

During the meeting, Adel said there have been allegations of extortion of Congolese nationals by Ugandan security forces along the border.

The relationship between the two countries has had ups and downs, with accusations ranging from harassment and border encroachment on the lake and land by each party, despite the existence of a bilateral agreement between the two countries.