

By Moses Mulondo

Local gold miners and residents of Bukuya county in Mubende district have petitioned the Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, to intervene and stop the pending eviction of locals from areas of gold deposits.

The petitioners, who included artisan miners, gold traders, *tribania* holders, landlords and service providers were led by their co-ordinator Robert Ssempevo. They informed Parliament that the Government is bent on displacing them from their ancestral land of 120 acres in Bukuya county and give it to a foreign investor identified as Gamestone International Ltd.

This followed reports that President Yoweri Museveni had directed their eviction so that an investor can occupy the land.

Kasanda North MP Patrick Nsamba said he attended the meeting where Museveni made the directive on June 15, 2017. "I realised that the President had been misled. We should not give priority to foreign investors over locals. I went to South Africa and realised local miners have been empowered by government. In Zambia, they have gold, but it is mined by foreigners and locals are in abject poverty. We want our people to be empowered and even given licences to mine gold."

The meeting was among others attended by the state minister for investment, Evelyn Anite, the Kassanda County North MP Patrick Nsamba Oshabe, the director of CMI, Brig. Charles Bakahumura, Gertrude Njuba, the minister of state in charge of minerals, and the minister for internal affairs.

In various meetings the petitioners have had, Ssempevo said, they resolved to oppose the presidential directive.

"The president's directive was based on assumptions and false allegations presented to him by the investor and his accomplices," they stated in the petition.

They presented their petition to the Speaker in the company of their area MPs who included Bukuya County MP Dr Michael Bukenya, Nsamba, Kasambya County MP Gaffa Mbwaterkamwa,

Gold miners petition Kadaga over president's directive



Jamila Kilza, a gold miner from Mubende, hugs Kadaga after the miners presented a petition seeking to be granted mining rights, at Parliament on Tuesday. Photo by Kennedy Oryema

Kadaga reacts

■ The Speaker said whereas the country has enormous potential in the minerals sector, the sector has not been given the commitment and priority it deserves.

Kassanda South MP Simeo Nsubuga, Buwekula County MP Maj. Joseph Kakooza, and the Buganda caucus chairman Johnson Muyanja Ssenyonga.

The MPs vowed that they will do whatever it takes to defend their people from getting evicted.

The petitioners asked Parliament to investigate Gamestone International Ltd, which they accused of changing names many times, grabbing people's land, and failure to pay royalties from the gold it mines.

"The investor evicted people in several villages, undervalued their

property and hence underpaid them, demolished schools, roads, churches, and destroyed water sources. He promised to reconstruct these facilities in neighbouring villages, but to-date nothing has been done," they stated.

The petitioners said whereas the investor was given a licence for three years at the end of which he was supposed to forfeit 50% of the 207 square kilometres of land, the contract was renewed in February last year without the company forfeiting some land as section 30 of the Mining Act

requires.

They urged the President to honour the pledges of empowering them, which he made to the artisanal miners during his 2016 presidential campaigns when he went to the area.

Bukenya said: "We are not fighting the President because he was misled. He made a directive without consulting other stakeholders. We want him to come to Mubende to know the truth. We want a small portion of the land of five square kilometres the investor claims is his to be given to locals to mine gold as their source of livelihood. This is their ancestral land."

Mbwatekamwa said: "I cannot support the presidential directive of chasing away our people from their land. We are tired of the obsession of empowering foreign investors at the expense of Uganda citizens. We have been overwhelmingly voting NRM and this is how we are now being paid. In Buhweju, locals including ministers are freely mining gold."

Kakooza said, "The issue of Bukuya is an eyeopener. The President did not listen to us. There is a lot of land grabbing in Mubende. As leaders of Mubende, we shall unite to fight these acts."

Kadaga said Nsamba's private member's Bill of Local Content would help to safeguard the interests of citizens against exploitation by foreigners.

"I think the President should have contacted other stakeholders. The people of Uganda now know how to fight for their rights. The citizens of Mubende deserve a right to a source of livelihood."

The Speaker said whereas the country has enormous potential in the minerals sector, the sector has not been given the commitment and priority it deserves.

Mining