

Encroachers re-claim Ibambaro Forest Reserve

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KAMPALA. Two years after eviction, a group of people have reclaimed part of Ibambaro Central Forest Reserve in Kyegegwa and Kyenjojo districts.

State House officials and human rights activists have also asked for fresh boundary demarcation of the reserve.

According to the documents, Mr Apollo Mabaati, a special presidential assistant, and the legal department of Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI) have separately written to NFA and the Commissioner Mapping and surveys seeking a re-survey of the forest boundaries arguing that a group of people from Kanyabatoro - Kikuba in Kyegegwa and Kihuuna in Kyenjojo were dissatisfied with the earlier survey report.

In one of the letters by FHRI, the forestry authority is accused of extending the forest reserve thereby evicting some people from their land. In an October 20, 2015 letter, Mr Mabaati directed the legal department of FHRI to institute investigations into how NFA evicted the people from the contested area and said that surveys were not genuine.

Ibambaro CFR is one of the government forest reserves under Matiri forest sector in Muzizi River Range.

When contacted, Mr Robert Owiny, the NFA Range Manager in charge of the Muzizi confirmed the developments, saying: "The real people who used to occupy the forest reserve left but due to the political period, another group is trying to resurrect the encroachment process. We are not aware of any complaint of victimisation as alleged and we invite whoever is complaining to come to the ground," said Mr Owiny.

He explained that Kihuuna Village that is mentioned in the letter is adjacent to the reserve where NFA held sensitisation meetings on sustainable forest use and management.