

**The claims.** The seven-member committee, which is investigating land conflicts in the country heard that Hajj Swaib Yiga forcefully evicted peasants from land that they have occupied for more than five decades.

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**KAMPALA.** It was a sombre mood as a teenager narrated to the commission of inquiry into land matters of how a businessman, accused of land grabbing in Nakaseke District, tortured him over alleged theft.

Stephen Matovu, 15, said Hajj Swaib Yiga employed him and others to work on his farm in Mizimbo village, Kapeeka Sub-county in Nakaseke District, but later accused him of stealing maize and farm implements.

"... Hajj (Yiga) and his driver arrested me over theft, dragged me into his car and drove me [away]... deep in the maize plantation, he tore my clothes and with the help of his driver pressed my genitals with pliers. He told me he can kill and bury me in the plantation if I shout," he said.

Matovu told the commission he was released after his mother paid Shs1.1m as compensation that Hajj Yiga had demanded from the family.

The teenager asked the commission to compel Hajj Yiga to meet his medical bills because he is currently passing out blood and has difficulty in walking. Matovu testified that he had been employed on Yiga's farm on a land he allegedly grabbed from peasants in Mizimbo village.

#### Another witness

Another witness, Mr Godfrey Sekalongo, told the commission that Hajj Yiga's aide Joseph Kasozi hired him to transport his items on his motorcycle on July 29.

Police officers, he said, intercepted them near the farm and a crime preventer only identified as Kabaaya subsequently assaulted and injured him before he was detained at Kapeeka Police Station.

"While at my workplace, Kasozi came and asked me to transport his goods in the evening. We agreed that I would work for Shs10,000, but while on the way to collect the goods, I heard gunshots and in the process Kasozi jumped off the motorcycle and disappeared. I lost control and fell down. That is how I was arrested," Mr Sekalongo said.

# Land grabber accused of squeezing teenager's genitals

He narrated that upon arrest; he spent a night at Kapeeka Police Station and was later transferred to Kiwoko Police Station, still within Nakaseke District, where he spent four days before being arraigned in court. Mr Sekalongo is currently on remand at Wakyato government prison where he was picked from to testify before the commission.

He said: "I was remanded until August 17 but the charges were only read for me in court. I am not aware of the six [stolen] bags of maize because I was arrested while on the way driving Kasozi to the area where he was to direct me."

Asked on which charges he had been remanded, Mr Sekalongo said: "I was told that the charges were in regard to stealing six bags of maize belonging to Hajj Yiga, worth Shs300,000."

“I was informed of the right to bail but I was far away from home. Even Kasozi whom I was driving has since disappeared. I am being framed on matters I do not know,” GODFREY SEKALONGO, WITNESS

Mr Sekalongo and Matovu's families are part of the people from six villages in Kapeeka Sub-county accusing Hajj Yiga of colluding with local authorities to grab more than 1,000 acres of their land. The claimants say they have lived on the land for more than five decades.

#### And out of police

The witness informed the commission that several other residents have been in and out of police custody as well as remand to prisons for opposing Hajj Yiga's seizure of their land.

"I had 10 heads of cattle but due to land grabbing, I sold them. Hajj (Yiga) orders his workers to slaughter people's animals and destroy our gardens," he said.

It is alleged that since September 2016, Hajj Yiga employed a group of people armed with machetes and axes to destroy peoples' crops.

The commission has now issued fresh summons for Hajj Yiga to appear and respond to the allegations.



**Accused.** Hajj Swaib Yiga is accused of grabbing land and evicting peasants in Kapeeka Sub-county, Nakaseke District. FILE PHOTO.