

Govt evicts 1,000 Mubende farmers

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MUBENDE. At least 1,000 farmers in Butoloogo Sub-county, Mubende District, have to look for alternative farmland after government banned cultivation in Mpunve Forest Reserve.

Water and Environment minister Sam Cheptoris, who issued the directive recently, said the farmers have depleted the forest reserve.

"They (farmers) had been left to practice some cultivation hoping that they will sustainably use the land, manage and protect our forest reserve, but they are completely destroying it," Mr Cheptoris said after addressing the farmers.

He said more than 30 per cent of Central Mpunve Forest reserve, which has 1,810 hectares, has been destroyed by residents who have planted maize.

"We cannot allow the situation to continue like this, where people are massively grabbing forest land, this has to stop with immediate effect," he said.

Mr Michael Mugisa, the executive director of National Forestry Authority, said all encroachers will be evicted before end of this month.

"We are going to use our environment police to evict them and if we need reinforcement, the Army will come in, since we already have a Memorandum of Understanding with them to assist us in restoring our

forests," Mr Mugisa said.

However, some of the farmers told the minister that they legally acquired the land in the forest after paying some money to the area sub-country chairperson, Mr Lauben Mukisa, who denied the allegations.

"Each of us was asked to pay a fee of Shs150,000 and two sacks of maize per acre every season and all this goes to our sub county chairperson," Mr Simon Lutalo, one of the residents, who grow maize in Mpunve Forest Reserve, said.

Mr Mukisa said the farmers are being used by his political opponent to tarnish his name.

"Am I stupid to solicit money from residents when I know that the forest doesn't belong to me?" Mr Mukisa asked.