

Serious. When the veterans first camped at the school at the beginning of this year, no one imagined they would turn the school playground into a second home.

BY SADAT MBOGO
editorial@bug.nationmedia.com

War veterans occupy school, seek audience with Museveni

MPIGI. For six months now, more than 5,000 non-armed bush war veterans have pitched camp at Kitagenda Primary School in Lwamata Town Council, Kiboga District, seeking compensation for their sacrifices in the war that ushered President Museveni to power in 1986.

When the veterans first camped at the school at the beginning of this year, no one, not even the local leaders, imagined they would turn the school playground into a second home.

But now, the veterans insist they won't vacate the school until President Museveni, their former Bush War commander, meets them again and settles their long-standing compensation claims for property they lost during the five-year guerrilla war between 1981 and 1986.

No agreement yet

Although President Museveni met the group in January in Kiboga and later at State House, Entebbe, the veterans' leaders claim there was no conclusive agreement reached between the two parties.

Before visiting the group in January, President Museveni had earlier in December 2016 donated 200 bags of maize flour, 50 bags of beans, 40 bags of rice and 10 cows to the group to enable them enjoy the festive season as they waited for an audience with him.

"When a select committee of the members met him at State House, Entebbe, between March 16 and 17 this year, he assured us of compensation. It was his word that he would meet us again here (in Kiboga) in two weeks' time, but that period elapsed and we haven't seen him," Mr Tomusange Jagwe Tindyebywa, said during an interview last Friday.

Mr Jagwe is the chairperson of the Patriotic Veterans Association of Kasejere-Kigemuzi-Nkurumah Unit of Singo sub-region.

"We will not leave this playground unless he first meets us again as promised," Mr Tindyebywa says, adding that the veterans are unhappy that after they fought the war, they were forgotten and those who played no role are the ones "enjoying the fruits of the liberation".

"We wouldn't be suffering now if President Museveni and his people had compensated us. Those who did nothing during the war are the ones deceiving the President that we are not genuine claimants. We are not stupid to claim what doesn't belong to us. We just want them to give us what we lost, and nothing else," Mr Jagwe adds.

District boss accused

He partly blames their woes on Mr Israel Yiga, the chairperson Kiboga District, who he accuses of frustrating their efforts to secure compensation.

"That is the reason why the President also chased him out of the meeting we had at State House. He (Yiga) is part of the clique that swindled our compensation money," he adds.

The veterans, comprising elderly women and men are living in deplorable conditions and sleep in the cold.

They also lack basic amenities, including clean water, basic healthcare and lavatory facilities, which put their lives at risk



Persistent. Some of the veterans at Kitagenda Primary School in Lwamata Town Council, Kiboga District, prepare porridge last week. PHOTO BY EDISON NDAYISIMBA

Voices



"Despite having filled up one of our toilets, we have no problem with those people. They always clean our toilet facilities and they don't make noise for us when we are teaching, we pray that government listens to their concerns and they go back to homes," JOYCE NAMATOVU, STAFF AT KITAGENDA PRIMARY SCHOOL



"We wouldn't be suffering now if President Museveni and his people had compensated us. Those who did nothing during the war are the ones deceiving the President that we are not genuine claimants," TOMUSANGE JAGWE TINDYEBWA, CHAIRPERSON PATRIOTIC VETERANS ASSOCIATION

four unknown people as he left Lwamata Pentecostal Church where he had gone for prayers, and was smeared with human waste, claiming he had defecated on the road.

But Mr Yiga, in an interview with *Daily Monitor* last week, said the veterans are being misled by their leaders whom he accused of pushing for their selfish interests

by the President's directive and return to their homes as he sorts out their issues, but they instead want to sleep in the school playground," Mr Yiga says.

"Those people are really a burden to us. They have refused to work and are looking for free things," he adds.

Mr Yiga says for the period the veterans have been pitching camp at the playground, they have filled up one of the school's pit-latrines and have made the entire place filthy.

"As a district, we had to look for Shs23m to construct another pit-latrines for the pupils after they [veterans] filled up one of the toilets the pupils were using," he says.

Mr Sulaiman Sserunjogi, a member of Luweero Veterans Verification Committee, who recently met the group, insists that much as they are genuine claimants, the programme of compensating Bush War claimants ended in 2007 and advised the group to return to their respective homes.

"Giving you money will not necessarily improve your economic status. In fact, government has given you money, cows and other items over the years. But you continue demanding more. If it is true that you did not get compensation, please go back home and participate in government programmes like Operation Wealth Creation to change your lives," Mr Sserunjogi told the veterans during a recent meeting.

Mr Dennis Galabuzi Ssozi, the State minister for Luweero Triangle, says President Museveni has met the group more times "than he meets some ministers" and he

ABOUT THE AREA

Significance. Kiboga is part of the Luweero Triangle, which also covers Luweero, Nakaseke, Mubende, Kiboga, Mpigi, Butambala and Nakasongola districts, where a fledgling guerrilla army led by Mr Museveni, pitched camp between 1981 and 1986, to launch the five-year Bush War that brought the current NRM government to power.

Veterans. The area has many elderly men and women who claim to have played a crucial role in sustaining the war by donating food and cows to the then National Resistance Army rebels.

"The President has met that group four times between December and March and he has always clearly explained to them that he suspended processing of gratuity in their area due to some irregularities," Mr Galabuzi says.

"Those people are asking for too much, whenever they feel that they are broke, they pitch camp at that school and demand compensation. Some even included names of their sons and grandsons on the lists of claimants. How can you convince me that a youth of 28 years played part in the war which ended 31 years ago?" he asks.

Mr Galabuzi says the group had earlier received some financial assistance from government to enable them recover what they had lost during the war and the first package of Shs200m was delivered to them by Gen Salim Saleh, himself a war veteran and coordinator of Operation Wealth Creation.

"They (veterans) came back again and at that time, the Office of the Prime Minister gave them Shs240 million before the President himself donated to them cows and even gave them another Shs250 million in cash when he visited them in Kiboga in January," he says.

The minister said in the subsequent meetings that the President held with veterans' leaders, he has always directed them to go back to their homes as government sorts out their issues.

Senior presidential press secretary Don Wanyama says: "The President has met that group several times and is aware about their plight and had promised to meet them again, but due to his busy