

L. Victoria Hotel faces demolition

By Adolf Ayoreka

Following the on going implementation and construction of the Kampala Entebbe Express Highway that has caused a number of people to lose buildings and homes, one of the historical hotels in Uganda, LAICO Lake Victoria Hotel, is set to be demolished to give way for the road works, a move that has been opposed by the hotel management.

The neighbouring Entebbe municipal council building and St John's Church will also be affected by the project, according to the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA).

This was revealed in the meeting that was convened by UNRA officials to dialogue with the people affected by the project in Entebbe municipality.

The dialogue took place at Entebbe municipal council hall on Wednesday.

"Ever since we bought this business from the Government in 2002, we have never extended the hotel. If it is in a road reserve, then that is the fault of the former owner, who wants to demolish us. The perimeter wall is exactly where it was back then. So, we do not want your money," Haruna Ssentamu, the financial controller at the hotel, told UNRA officials, led by Moses Kintu, the land valuer.

The hotel structures earmarked for demolition include the main store, a 240,000-litre underground water reservoir, a power house, generators, garbage house and parking yard.

According to Ssentamu, the departments that have been earmarked for demolition are crucial to the daily operations of the hotel, a chain of LAICO Hotels and Resorts.

"We have nowhere to relocate these units. The hotel sits on a small acreage. We are not against the project, but why can't the designs be reviewed to go via State House and works ministry which have a lot of land?" asked Ssentamu.

He added that the hotel was among the leading taxpayers in Entebbe and Uganda.

"Recently, we paid over sh400m in ground and property taxes," Ssentamu said.

He was supported by other members, who formed an umbrella association named Project Affected Persons (PAP).

The Rev. Emmanuel

Ssewanyana of St John's Church complained that demolishing a historical hotel, which defines Entebbe, will be doing a disservice to this country. He also proposed that since the project is a design and build one, they should review the designs and shift the road to the State House side gardens, where land is idle.

Dan Fred Lutaya, the senior assistant town clerk for Entebbe municipality, observed that demolishing Lake Victoria Hotel will greatly affect the revenue tax base at the municipal council. "Sometimes we have been stuck with finances here, but when this hotel pays its ground and property tax, things get back to normal. So, I pray that you tell those people at the top that we do not want the hotel demolished."

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The hotel structures earmarked for demolition are the main store, a 240,000-litre underground water reservoir, a power house, generators, garbage house and parking yard.

Kintu said the Authority had reviewed the designs three times and further changes would compromise the standard of the road.

"We cannot change anything," he added, throwing the meeting into chaos.

After calm was restored, Kintu asked the hotel management and the committee to forward their complaints to UNRA.

According to Mazen Gatati, the managing director of the hotel, demolishing the most important departments of the hotel means that the hotel will be out of business for more than six months yet they have bookings for next year.

"We receive many clients, including government officials, who come to meet the President and foreigners. Even if they compensate us billions of money, it cannot help us. We have no space to relocate these departments, unless they want us to leave business. We shall do whatever is necessary to ensure that this hotel remains.

The hotel was built in 1948 by the Government and was renovated in 2008. It has over 180 employees.



A section of the Kampala-Entebbe express highway in Ruwaga