

OPM officials accused of grabbing farmland

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KEY ISSUES

Loss. Mr Stephen Irumba testified that he lost more than 100 head of cattle during the destruction of his property on the land neighbouring the refugee settlement.

Ownership. In all the meetings held with OPM officials, Irumba said no document has ever been presented to prove ownership of the land.

Eviction. The OPM officials said their mission to clear the land will be investigated by the court and the affected parties.

KAMPALA. Officials in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) have been accused of grabbing a 200-acre of farmland in Kazinga Village, Rwentuha Sub-county in Kyegegwa District.

It is alleged that in 2016, senior officials from the OPM violently evicted Mr Stephen Irumba and destroyed his property claiming to use the land to settle expelled Ugandans from Tanzania.

The OPM officials allegedly claimed the land was part of Kyaka I Refugee Settlement Camp in Kyegegwa District.

Appearing before the Justice Catherine Bamugemereire - led Commission of Inquiry into land matters in the country sitting in Kampala yesterday, Mr Irumba testified that he lost more than 100 head of cattle during the destruction of his property on the land neighbouring the refugee settlement.

He accused OPM officials led by the commissioner, Mr Martin Owor, and the principal settlement officer, Mr Charles Bafaki, among others of deploying armed security personnel during the eviction.

"I was abroad and I spoke to the commandant in charge of Kyaka I Refugee Settlement only identified as Mr Mugenyi who said they have no intention of interfering with my farm because they had known it before. A few days after, my sister called me that they are settling people on my farm.

My sister took a copy of our lease title to Mr Mugenyi but he sent her away saying he was following orders from above (at OPM)," Mr Irumba said.

He said the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, promised that the issue would be investigated by the permanent secretary but instead of having the matter resolved, he emailed informing him of an ongoing resettlement activity, where residents, including the district chairperson, were contributing land and that he (Irumba) should also contribute land to that effect.

BACKGROUND

Eviction. In 2016, senior officials from the OPM violently evicted Mr Stephen Irumba and destroyed his property claiming to use the land to settle expelled Ugandans from Tanzania.

"I did not understand what it meant by a government official telling a private land owner as well as an investor to surrender part of his land to the settlement camp," he said.

According to Mr Irumba, OPM officials have kept on tossing him by scheduling unfulfilled meetings to settle the matter as his investment continues to collapse.

He said a meeting with Dr Rugunda revealed to him that technical officers at OPM had reported that his title overlaps that of the refugee settlement land.