

Balaalo pastoralists give in, begin leaving West Nile

PAKWACH

By Benedict Okethwengu

Pastoralists, commonly known as *Balaalo* have started leaving the West Nile region following President Yoweri Museveni's directive to all residents district Commissioners (RDCs) in the region to oversee their expulsion by mid-March. According to Bessie Ajilong, the Nebbi RDC, the pastoralists

started leaving the region in early January.

"The *Balaalo* were hesitant about the presidential directive, but eventually they have started leaving," she said.

Ajilong said they are expecting a team of the Uganda People's Defence Forces and the Uganda Police officers in the region to back them up in enforcing the directives.

Ajilong said it would also be fair and wise for others *Balaalo*

to comply with the President's directive other than waiting to be forced out.

Late last year, when the President was touring the region, residents overwhelmingly asked him to prevail over the influx of *Balaalo*.

During the same tour in Gulu, Museveni directed Brig. Emmanuel Kanyesigye, the UPDF 4th Division commander to ensure that the *Balaalo* in the area fenced off their land

to control their cattle from destroying people's crops or else they would face eviction.

West Nile as part of Acholi and Bunyoro sub-region has been grappling with the influx of *Balaalo*.

Different districts and sub-county councils in the region have in the recent past passed resolutions to have the *Balaalo* evicted to no avail.

In February last year, Arua district Council resolved to have

all the *Balaalo* leave West Nile region.

Similar resolutions were passed by Moyo and Nebbi district councils. There are more than 25,000 head of cattle belonging to the *Balaalo* in West Nile.

Steen Omito, a resident of Pakwach district, said the directive was timely, adding it was high time the *Balaalo* heeded the President's call.

"Our earlier council resolution

to evict the cattle keepers met with stiff resistance. I am happy the President has listened to our plea. These fellows valued their cattle more than our crops," Omito said. Emmanuel Rutengwa, one of the leaders of the *Balaalo* in West Nile region, confirmed to *New Vision* the development. He, however, argued that the directives have devastated them since they had been living in the region as their homes.