

BY STEPHEN OTAGE

KAMPALA. The National Organisation of Trade Unions (Notu) has urged the government to provide a clear work plan for thousands of arts and crafts dealers across the country, whose businesses are increasingly under threat.

Speaking in an interview yesterday, Ms Agnes Kim Atwooki, the chairperson of the Notu Women's League, expressed disappointment over the treatment of their members during the national Women's Day celebrations at the Kololo Ceremonial Grounds at the weekend.

She explained that members were blocked from exhibiting their crafts at Kololo and later learned of government's plan to relocate them from the National Theatre to an undisclosed location to pave the way for construction of a modern tourist centre and crafts village.

Come clean on National Theatre evacuation, craft dealers tell govt

"We were told that this year, our women would not be allowed to exhibit their arts and crafts at Kololo airstrip. Instead, they want new innovations that showcase technical skills like engineering," Ms Atwooki said, adding that the decision left members feeling like they had been left out in the cold.

She further condemned the move to evict arts and crafts dealers from the National Theatre without identifying an alternative site, saying it runs counter to the spirit of this year's Women's Day theme.

"You cannot ask our members to produce sophisticated crafts requiring technical and engineering skills without first skilling them and equipping them with the necessary tools. When

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construction begins at the National Theatre, our members will need a place to keep the wheels of their trade turning," Ms Atwooki emphasised.

This year's theme was Scaling up investment to accelerate access to justice for all women and girls in Uganda.

Her comments echoed concerns she had raised last week about a planned ban on crafts exhibitions at this year's Women's Day celebrations.

Last Friday, Ms Esther Anyakun, the State minister for Labour, Employment and Industrial Relations, denied the claims, saying the government could not take such a drastic step given the jobs at stake. She explained that the plan is to redevelop the National Theatre and create a major market hub that will attract tourists.

The minister explained that the government is targeting women benefiting from the GROW programme, for whom

two new facilities are being built to provide exhibition space.

Asked about timelines for construction and relocation, Mr Robert Musitwa, the public relations officer at the Uganda National Cultural Centre, said a press conference would be held this week to address all concerns.

Meanwhile, Mr Daniel NuweAbine, the spokesperson for Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), noted that an application for the redevelopment of the National Theatre had not yet been received. "First of all, do they have the space for expansion? Have they done an impact assessment to relocate the people? There must be a comprehensive plan. What happens to the livelihoods of those who have been working here?"