Mbale, Mbarara vendors asked to vacate streets

Officials say the operation is targeting all vendors operating from streets and ungazetted areas, including the transport sector.

BY MONITOR TEAM

In a move to restore trade order and sanity in the central business areas of the cities of Mbale and Mbarara, city councils have unveiled plans to force vendors into designated markets.

In Mbale, the council on Wednesday issued an ultimatum of five days to the vendors, while in Mbarara, city authorities gave street vendors two weeks ultimatum.

Mr Assy Abirebe, the Mbale City clerk, in a press conference held at the Mbale City Council chambers on Wednesday, said the enforcement will begin on Monday, March 2.

Mr Abirebe said the operation is targeting all vendors operating from streets and ungazetted areas, including the transport sector. He said there are enough markets in the city to accommodate all the vendors.

"A city can only function if there is order, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the city is in order," he said, appealing to the vendors to vacate streets within the prescribed period.



Some of the vendors sell their goods on Mbale streets. In Mbale, the council on Wednesday issued an ultimatum of five days to the vendors. PHOTO/DERICK WENANI

Ultimatum

"Those selling on the streets have been given five days, and those who will resist are the ones we shall forcefully remove from the streets. We are going to deploy our enforcement team and with police backing. Whoever we find on the streets selling illegally will be taken and charged in courts of law," Mr Abirebe said.

He added that they are also going to organise markets to accommodate all the people who are selling on the streets.

"If you went to our markets, they are not so organised, and this operation is also going to help us organise them. The markets were meant for the poor, and the majority of the people selling on the streets are the ones supposed to work from these markets," he said.

Mr Abirebe also warned that they are to restore the transport order in the city by taking all the passenger vehicles and lorries off the streets to the parks.

"You are aware that in the past, we had removed lorries from Cathedral Avenue. We had pushed the taxis to do business from the tax parks, and cleaned Kumi Road. For boda bodas, we have gazetted areas for them, where we are going to put signposts, and we have done this in consultation with the leadership of the riders," he said.

Mr Hamza Banja, the Deputy Resident City Commissioner in-charge of the Industrial City Division, said they are ready to provide security for enforcement.

"We have been sitting as the city security committee and agreed that the town must have some order. If you walk around the city, you realise that there is a lot of disorder coming from the vendors and motorists. They have taken up the pedestrian walkways and are selling things in the middle of the roads," he said.

Mr Banja added that it is going to be a thorough operation, including even uprooting criminals in the city who have been hiding in congested areas of the city to steal people's properties.

"It is not only a disorder but also breeds criminals. Many bad people are hiding where they are selling these things, and many phones have been snatched. We are going to help the city council by providing security," Mr Banja said.

BACKGROUND

In April last year, Mbale City relocated all trucks and Lorries from the central business district and allocated them a parking yard at Mpumude playgrounds in Northern city division, but have all returned to their former workplaces in the city centre along Cathedral Avenue, Manafa road, and Nkokonjeru terrace.

The taxis were also barred from operating along Pallisa, Tororo, and Kumi roads, directed to the park, and have since resumed operations.

However, this is not the first time that Mbale City has enforced this policy concerning trade and transport orders in the city.

Some of the residents in the city accuse the city officials of extorting money from the street vendors, and that they cannot enforce the directive because it is their source of income.

Mr Hakim Watenyeri, a senior citizen in Mbale City, said the enforcement team should be blamed for the flawed laws by the vendors because they collect money from them.

"This is not the first they have been expelled, but they keep coming back because some of these enforcers are taking money from them, and this money is shared by many people, which has made it hard. We have elements in the city council who are enforcing corruption instead of the law," Mr Watenyeri said.

Mr Ali Walusimbi, the president of the Mbale City Development Forum, said they have sensitised vendors and all other people doing business in ungazetted areas and prepared them for the operation.

"The people are prepared because we have been enlightening them that we need to have Mbale at heart," Mr Walusimbi said, also pointing to the failure of the previous operations to combat corruption.

In an Interview with *Daily Monitor*, the Mbarara City Town Clerk, Ms Justine Barekye, said the vendors who operate on the streets have two weeks to leave or risk losing their merchandise

"We are planning to crack down on street vendors from the streets because they have unregulated and uncontrolled businesses along the streets, and they are bringing confusion to the entire city," she said.

She added: "They are causing traffic jam, congestion, and they are competing with other formal business teams that pay us taxes in the form of property taxes, in the form of trading licenses, in the form of local service tax, and other taxes," she said.

She said the street vendors do not pay any money to the city council, but they continue to disorganise and litter the city.

"Therefore, we are giving them two weeks to leave. They should come to us and we get space for them because we have space in the markets, let them come, and we give them space," she said.

Mr Brain Rukundo, a shoe vendor on Mbaguta Road, said the markets that the city officials want them to go to cannot accommodate them all.

"The directive for us to leave the streets wouldn't be bad, but we don't have anywhere to go. They are saying we go to the central market, will it accommodate all of us?" he said.

Compiled by Derick Wenani, Cosline Nakahira & Julius byamukama

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