

UPDF's marine unit winning war against illegal fishing

By John Semakula

Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) marine unit has registered tremendous achievements in the fight against illegal fishing on water bodies in the last one year.

According to the commander of the unit fighting illegal fishing, Lt Col James Nuwagaba, their operations have restored sanity on the water bodies.

He said fish stocks had increased by over 30%, paving way for the establishment of new fish factories in Kampala, which have created new jobs.

Some of the companies dealing in fish are Uganda Fish Packers Limited in Kinawataka and Lake Bounty Limited.

Although Nuwagaba did not name the new fish factories, he said in the past one year, three fish factories had reopened; one in Nakawa division and two in the central division.

Available statistics show that at the time the task force began its operations a year ago, Uganda's fish exports had declined from 36,000

Lt Col James Nuwagaba of the UPDF marine unit supervises the destruction of some of the illegal fishing gear surrendered by fishermen at Bwonda Landing site in Mayuge last month. PPU



tonnes worth \$143m (about sh486b) to 14,000 metric tonnes worth \$88m (about sh299b).

It is that depletion and decline in revenue that forced President Yoweri Museveni to form the UPDF marines enforcement taskforce to fight illegal fishing.

Nuwagaba indicated that if the

water bodies recovered, the fishing industry would outcompete coffee as the largest foreign exchange earner for the country.

Nuwagaba's task force is responsible for fighting the transportation and sale of immature fish.

During their operations across the country, multiple unlicensed,

substandard and illegal fishing gear has been burned.

At their latest area of operation in Molongo sub-county, Mayuge district, the force destroyed 127 fishing boats, 15,000 monofilament plastic nets, 58 locally made fishing commonly known as *kokota*, 472 gill nets, 170 cast nets, 1,800 substandard hooks,

32 silver fish (*mukene*) nets as well as 2,700 monofilament hooks and lines.

Nuwagaba also warned the public, especially those in the transport sector, to be vigilant and scrutinise every item they transport on their vehicles.

Nuwagaba also reminded fishermen at Bwondha fish landing site that their recent operation marked the final launch of a 24-hour surveillance of illegal fishing just as the case had been in other districts of Namayingo, Bugiri, Busia and Jinja surrounding Lake Victoria.

The area LC1 chairman, Hakim Irumba, said the fishermen were fully behind the operations of the marine unit in fighting illegal fishing.

He said the measures would benefit those who have invested and are mindful of the importance of the fishing industry in the lives of fishermen and the country at large.

The operation was crowned with general cleaning of the landing site to improve the hygiene with the support of officials from the Association of Fishers and Lake Users of Uganda (AFALU).