Minister launches Chinese vessel to dredge Lake Victoria

By Eddie Ssejjoba

The state minister for trade, Michael Werikhe Kafabusa, has launched the a multi-purpose cargo ship, which is going to dredge (de-silt) parts of Lake Victoria.

The vessel belongs to a Chinese company, the Mango Tree Group, that is working in partnership with Operation Wealth Creation (OWC).

According to the OWC, the dredging will be carried out to develop 28 landing sites into modern inland ports.

The function took place at Bugiri-Kawuku village on the Lake Victoria shores in Entebbe municipality, Wakiso district on Wednesday.

Werikhe, who represented the state minister for works, Gen. Katumba Wamala, said apart from de-silting the sites where ports are going to be built, which he said will improve water transport on Lake Victoria, the project is aimed at creating employment opportunities as a result of their enterprise and from other avenues, including tourism. He said the Government hopes to make water transport cheap, which he said will attract increased volumes of trade for Uganda, including handling export.

"The implementation of many of our contracts delays because of slow road transport plus high costs, but with more ports, we are bound to get many vessels plying Lake Victoria, which will mean an increase in trade volumes," he said.

He denied reports that the project is about sand mining, which he said had raised eyebrows across sections of the public, including some political leaders.

The function was attended by Wakiso district councillors led by the speaker, Simon Nsubuga and deputy chief administrative officer, Hajj Masokoyi Wasswa. However, the district chairperson, Matia Lwanga Bwanika and his executive shunned the function. Bwanika has opposed the activities of the Chinese firm that include mining sand in Lake Victoria.

"With more ports, we are bound to get many vessels plying Lake Victoria." **Werikhe**

The Mango Tree Group managing director, Fan Shu Chun complained that for two years the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) has refused to clear the company to carry out the dredging of the lake. He said NEMA argues that the dredging would affect the breeding grounds of fish and impact on the environment.

The deputy co-ordinator of OWC, Lt. Gen. Charles Angina, said NEMA's delay in the dredging had an element of corruption. He vowed that 'whoever stands in our way will be regarded as a saboteur and an agent of Satan and we shall deal with you."

New Vision was not able to get a comment from NEMA. But the authority has previously maintained that the company is carrying out sand mining in the lake.

However, Angina argued that sand mining was not part of the contract signed between the Government and the Dubai Port World company, which is to develop new ports on lake Victoria and improve the existing ones before it introduces vessels on the Lake. Bukasa is one of the sites that is going to be developed into a modern port.

"Whoever is against this project is against development," Angina said. He added that a number of businesses, including tourism, hotels, industries, beaches and others will be set up as a result of the project.

The Wakiso resident district commissioner, Maj. David Matovu, however, urged everyone to always seek an explanation about the activities the company plans to undertake.

"I think my chairman (Bwanika) is opposed to the project because he has fears, which would have been cleared had he come here," he said.

Matovu applauded Gen. Salim Saleh, the chief co-ordinator of OWC, for incorporating the dredging project in the scheme, saying other leaders should also embrace investors to enable the youth get jobs.



Werikhe, (second-right) and Lt. Gen. Angina, (right) at the launch of the Mango Tree Group dredger at Kawuku in Entebbe. Photo by Eddie Ssejjoba

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