

MPS PETITION MUSEVENI OVER MINERALS

BY JOHN ODYEK

Crooked officials and dubious investors are benefiting from Uganda's mineral wealth at the expense of Ugandans, according to a new report.

Global Witness, an international non-government organisation, carried an 18-month investigation and said minerals such as gold, tin and phosphate, that could create jobs and generate tax revenues, are threatened by mismanagement, lack of proper investment and corruption in the fledgling mining sector.

The report is titled "Uganda: How corruption, mismanagement and political influence is undermining investment in Uganda's mining sector and threatening people and environment June 2017".

GOVT RESPONSE

The Government said consultations are still going on the draft mining and mineral policy for Uganda.

The state minister for minerals, Peter Lokeris,

said: "I am optimistic that the new policy will soon be approved by Cabinet after the consultations." He explained that in the new policy, equitable sharing of royalties by districts and land owners will be addressed to avoid conflicts.

120
THE NUMBER
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"We want the new laws to ensure the investors pay set fees, taxes. Systems will be put to detect under-declaration of revenues and commodities," he said.

The minister said a few years ago, the Government issued exploration licences to investors on a first-come-

first-served basis, with many turning out to be speculators.

Eng. Joseph Okedi, the principal inspector of mines at the Directorate of Geological Survey and Mines, said some of the sticky issues in the industry today include the inadequate legal framework and insufficient investment in exploration.

Dennis Kusasira, a managing partner at ABMAK Associates, said acquiring surface rights or getting a mining lease does not give ownership over land. He said people were getting land under the pretext of mining and refuse to hand over when the land is required.

Elly Karuhanga, the president of the Uganda Chamber of Mines and Petroleum, said the Government should invest more in mineral exploration.

Meanwhile, seven National Resistance Movement lawmakers from Mubende district, including the state minister for Kampala, Benny Namugwanya, have petitioned President Yoweri Museveni over a US gold company planning to evict over 60,000



Artisans operating without licences were given seven days to vacate Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties

local artisans from Mubende.

The legislators argue that the one week that Gemstone International, a US company, has given to locals to vacate Kitumbi sub-county is not fair and reasonable.

"Your Excellency, whereas we MPs representing Mubende district appreciate your decision to organise the mining industry by protecting the interests of the investor, we have the following prayers before that instruction is implemented – ample time be allowed for which the miners will be sensitised, mobilised and prepared to relocate to the proposed relocation sites," lawmakers said.

The small scale miners, who are largely operating without licences from the Government, were given a seven-day ultimatum to vacate Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties in Mubende district. Gemstone International was recently licensed and given a mining lease of 21 years to explore gold deposits in Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties.

The MPs argue that the Government should balance the directive to protect the interests of the investor and the need to protect and promote the formation of small-scale miners' associations as established in the mineral policy of the

country.

To pave way for the investor, Peter Lokeris, the state minister for minerals, said the Government proposed that the artisan miners be relocated to 120 acres in Kayonza, Mubende district.

Francis Kibuuka Amooti, the LC5 chairperson of Mubende district, said the gold mining camps in the affected areas host close to 60,000 people, who earn daily from gold mining and contribute sh24m annually to the district in terms of revenue.

Additional reporting
by David Lumu and Paul Kiuuwa