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Uganda: Residents Fear Eviction After Land Giveaway

The Monitor (Kampala)

NEWS

February 12, 2007

Posted to the web February 12, 2007

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Tororo

As the land-give-away to investors continues, residents of Osukuru sub-county in Tororo district are crying foul because of what they call lack of transparency by the government in allocating land.

During a meeting with residents and the Assistant Commissioner in the Ministry of Energy John Odidi at Osukuru, area LC5 Chairman Emmanuel Osuna said only transparency by the government would solve the disagreement.

The government has leased Osukuru Hills, an area covering 26 square kilometres to Nilefos Mineral Limited, a subsidiary of Madhivani Group of Companies. The company is to carry out phosphate mining.

The area covers over 15 villages. It is estimated that between 8,000 and 15,000 people would be displaced when the mining begins later this year. Residents want the government to clearly mark out the area that has been allocated to the investor.

If it is the land that was formerly occupied by the defunct Tororo Chemical Industrial and Fertilizers plant or new areas have been sold to Madhivani. "We are told the area covers 26 square kilometres. But there are no clear boundaries. Our people are suspicious of the government," LC3 Chairman David Okurut said.

Residents fear that in case evictions are enforced, their land may be undervalued, they may be evicted before being compensated or not compensated at all. Mr Okurut said residents had stopped cultivating for fear of being evicted.

Assistant Commissioner in the Ministry of Energy John Odidi, however, said the government had given Nilefos a licence to explore phosphates on Osukuru Hills.

He said the exercise would not affect residents.

"You can stay where the mining is taking place. But if the investor finds that he wants to excavate the mineral and it will affect where you are, you will sit down with him and agree on the compensation," Mr Odidi said.