Artisanal miners petition President over eviction order

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**Directive.** The miners want the President to stop any directive to have them evicted.

KAMPALA. Thousands of artisanal miners in Mubende are living in fear after they were told about a proposal to evict them from land totaling about five square kilometres. The miners have now petitioned President Museveni over an eviction order that could see them taken off the land where they carry out gold mining.

On June 21, a petition was submitted to President Museveni to reverse any directive that would see them evicted.

"The president should reverse this order issued because we believe he was misled to issue it," says Mr. John Bosco Bukya, the spokesperson of the Mubende Artisanal Miners.

Estimates place 25,000 people directly involved in artisanal mining operations in Mubende.

The directive, according to the miners, was made last month after a meeting between President Museveni and a licence holder called Gemstone International.

"This is where a decision to protect the interest of the investor culminated into a presidential directive to evict and relocate artisanal miners in Kikyusa Sub-county," reads the petition.

However, Daily Monitor understands that it was a verbal directive issued and no official communication has been made yet.

**25,000**

**ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ARTISANAL MINING**

The miners were, however, informed by Mr Michael Bukunya, the Member of Parliament Bubuku County, Mubende District, that their eviction was imminent.

As a result, the miners decided to petition the president to rescind the directive.

There has been a long-running dispute between artisanal miners and two companies (Gemstone International and AUC Mining). The artisanal miners are accusing of taking over land licensed to AUC and Gemstone International to carry out mining activities.

The mining companies, on the other hand, allege that the artisanal miners are operating illegally on the land. A previous attempt in 2012 to evict the miners did not take place.

"We are not foreigners and at the moment, we are becoming treated as non-Ugandans," said the artisanal miners. Over 60,000 people working in these mines are being threatened with the eviction within one week.

This is unfair to Ugandans. They are talking about youth unemployment. We are not begging the government for money," said Ms. Caroline Kiruhire, the secretary general of the Siisingo Artisanal Gold Miners Association.

On several occasions, the miners through several associations have applied for Location licences - meant for small-scale mining activities - on an AUC Exploration Licence but have not been granted any.

The operations of artisanal miners have divided government officials in the energy ministry.

The Mining Act 2003 does not recognise artisanal mining in the country. Their activities have been classified as illegal by some. The law is currently being reviewed but so far, only the policy has been drafted.

President Museveni in February also said the artisanal miners needed to organise themselves into a specific area and allow the licensed investor to carry out mining activities.

When contacted by Daily Monitor yesterday, State minister for privatisation and investment Evelyn Anite said there is no such directive to evict the miners, that they are just speculating.