



Press Statement:

February 9, 2022

RE: Five people remanded as NEMA evicts encroachers from Okole wetland in Lira

A total of 5 people have been arrested and remanded to Lira Prison for taking part in the degradation of Okole Wetland at Railway Quarters A and B in Lira City. Okole wetland has been under threat occasioned by illegal rice cultivation, dumping of debris/murram and fencing off of portions of the wetland as private plots of land.

The arrests follow a joint inspection and enforcement operation undertaken by NEMA, the Ministry of Water and Environment Wetland Department in Northern Uganda, and the Environment Police Protection Unit.

The five suspects; Olaka Michael, Okot Emmanuel, Otwanga Jimmy, Odur Aron and Goi Sherrif were found cultivating rice in the wetland, and appeared before the Lira Chief Magistrates Court who remanded them. They have been charged with degradation of a wetland and introduction of alien species into a wetland contrary to the National Environment (river bank, lake shore and wetland) Regulations.

As per the Regulations, any person who, without prior appropriate approval, undertakes an activity that is likely to have adverse effects on a wetland, commits an offence and is liable to a prison sentence or to pay a fine as stipulated in the law. The five suspects will reappear in court for sentencing in due course.

In order to restore the wetland and prevent further degradation, all encroachers have been evicted from this section of Okole wetland and the channels that had been dug to drain water from the wetland have been closed to enable it to regenerate.

Wetlands are an important part of our ecosystem because they are a habitat for some species, perform hydrological functions such as regulation of water quality, reduce soil erosion and aid in flood control. Despite these important ecological functions, wetlands have been targeted for settlement, agriculture and other developments.

Notes to editor

On September 2 2021, NEMA indefinitely suspended the receipt, consideration and issuance of environment and social impact assessment certificates and permits for all projects within wetlands, in order to protect the wetlands.

Ends

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