



Press Statement:

November 3, 2021

RE: Two arrested in Kitubulu for degradation of Lake Victoria

The Environment Police arrested two people at a project site owned by Rajiv Ruparelia under M/s Speke Hotel (1996) Limited; in Kitubulu, Katabi Sub-county, Wakiso District. This follows routine surveillance by NEMA's Environmental Inspectors who discovered that the developer was dumping murrum into the lake, contrary to the conditions of approval in the Environment and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) certificate that had been issued to guide the development.

The two people arrested are Mr. Mukesh Kumar aged 29 and Mr. Vasava Bhavikkuman Bhikhabhai aged 26. Both are supervisors at the site where the environmental crime was taking place. The two will be arraigned in court soon.

The arrests follow NEMA's September 2, 2021 decision to indefinitely suspend the receipt, issuance and consideration for all projects within wetlands and a subsequent audit exercise for all previously approved projects. The suspension was undertaken to reduce pressure on wetlands and to enable Government build capacity to regulate developments in wetlands.

In this particular case, the developer is in possession of a valid NEMA ESIA certificate granting them permission to develop a recreational area including a sand beach, marina and hotel within the 200metres buffer zone of Lake Victoria. The site in question was formerly Ssesse Gateway Beach but was later acquired by Speke Hotel (1996) limited, and therefore, this explains the existence of some structures and vegetation species on the site. However, the developer violated the conditions of approval of the ESIA Certificate and was found dumping murrum into the lake, despite a recommendation by the District Environment Committee to preserve a 30 meter buffer zone from the shoreline.

The developer claimed that murrum was being dumped into the lake to recover the original project area that was taken up by the rising water levels. To the contrary, one of the conditions in the ESIA certificate is that the developer is duty bound to prevent degradation

of the Lakeshore in accordance with the National Environment (Wetlands, Riverbanks and Lake Shores Management) Regulations S.I. No. 153-5.

While it is true that since 2019 the water levels in Lake Victoria, the Nile and other water bodies have been rising owing to factors associated with climate change including increased rainfall; other aspects such as encroachment on wetlands, lakeshores and river banks, and poor land use practices have amplified the impacts.

Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa and a major tourist attraction. Permission to develop recreation centres including hotels within the 200 meter buffer zone of the lake is granted on the basis of facilitating sustainable tourism, however, developers ought to utilize the lake shores sustainably.

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