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PRESIDENT MUSEVENI ORDERS BALAALO WITH NON-FENCED FARMLAND TO LEAVE GREATER NORTH WITHIN 3 WEEKS

President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has ordered the Balaalo with non-fenced farmland in the Greater North to leave the region within three weeks.

The Greater North subregions which are being occupied by the Balaalo include Lango, Acholi and West Nile.

“Those who have got cows in non-fenced areas must go immediately because this is recklessness. Why should you bring cows in an area where you have no control? Therefore, I direct the Division Commander and the regional police Commander and then the Minister of Northern Uganda to issue orders for these people to move their cows. Anybody who has got cows in a non-fenced area, they must go. All of them,” the President said.

President Museveni issued the order today while meeting residents of Okidi, Atiak sub-county in Amuru district. His visit is aimed at

addressing the growing crisis of the settlement of Balaalo in the region.

The President also ordered that the Balaalo who are occupying government land like in Lakang and Aswa ranch to vacate it.

“They must leave. I give them three weeks to hire trucks and take their cows to wherever they take them. I would have confiscated the cows themselves but let them take their cows, sell them and do whatever they want to do,” he said.

He disclosed that when he passed an Executive Order banning the Balaalo from Acholi, he started to hear different voices from people and as NRM, they always try to hear everybody to know their side and solve the issue harmoniously.

“I therefore started with a group led by the Chief Justice, Owiny-Dollo and we had a long meeting in Entebbe, and I was taking notes. Then some of those they call Balaalo came. They came with landowners who either sold to them or rented land to them; they gave their version. I said no problem, I will come to one of the areas myself and hear directly from the people.”

The President also revealed that the disagreement between the Balaalo and the people of Greater North mainly stems from the issue of destruction of crops and ownership of land in the area.

“To have people destroying people's crops is totally not acceptable and therefore, I just want to crosscheck briefly but it's clear that if you have got cattle in an area which is not fenced, then obviously, they are liable to cause damage to people's crops,” President Museveni explained.

“Now that does not deal with the issue of ownership. Whether you bought or rented, we shall handle that later because here, we are not handling the issue of ownership or renting contracts because whether you bought or rented, you have no right to destroy my crops and that is why I have already asked the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to draft a law criminalising this type of nomadism. They must all go and I give them three weeks to leave and they should not go to invade other areas of Uganda, they should sell the cows, get money and do other things.”

The President also promised that he is going to have a final meeting with the two opinions; the one who are for the immediate eviction of the Balaalo and the ones who are saying that go slowly.

“I will have another meeting in Entebbe, and we will conclude,” he assured.

“Now if there are people who have fenced their land, where they are renting and fenced properly, those ones can wait until we discuss in more detail. We shall discuss how to handle the issue of ownership and renting. That's the second issue because you hear these people saying this land is ours. The cultural leader is saying that it is for the Clan.”

The President further requested the people of Acholi to be careful while dealing with the Balaalo issue because it is sensitive and can cause problems.

“You should be careful, don't just talk about them anyhow, like Gilbert Olanya has been saying that “Balaalo cannot come to here because Acholi is Acholi land, Balaalo cannot come here”, then you put me in problems because during the war I found my people

suffering in an IDP in Anaka, I asked them what they were doing there, they said they have nowhere to go because there's war here. I said Uganda is big, if there's war here, you go to other parts of Uganda, I told them to cross the Nile and go to the other side,” the President stressed.

“They listened to my advice and crossed the Nile and went to a place called Bweyale. There were only three shops at Bweyale at that time but if you go there today, it’s a huge town and the majority of the people there are the Acholi people. If you say that non-Acholi people should not come to Acholi, then what should I do with my people in Bweyale? Do I say that you go back or what? So, you need to be careful. Therefore, we need to handle this issue carefully. These people who are playing around, should talk about the matter seriously and we shall solve it.”

On the issue of cultural clash between the two parties, Gen. Museveni said, “These Balaalo bath naked when children are watching. We shall also discuss this issue when we meet as a smaller group.”

The President also blamed MPs and other leaders for the failure to push forward his program of commercializing agriculture, saying this would have solved the problem of underutilizing land.

“What they need to do is to transition from grazing grass born by God to grazing grass planted by themselves. That is what my MPs here are not telling them because if you depend on free range, you need three acres to support one cow in a year. So if you have got 1 square mile, you can only support 200 cows properly but if you plant the grass deliberately, and you cut for the cows, one acre

can feed 8 cows in a year. In ten acres, you can keep 80 friesian cows. In 30 acres, you can keep 240 cows. It is a big land, but they are now underutilizing it because they don't listen to what I tell them, and leaders don't transmit to them what I tell them.”

On the other hand, the President cautioned the people of Acholi and Greater North at large against land fragmentation and also asked cultural leaders to adjust on the laws governing clan land to facilitate development.

“Then there's another disease which I don't want you, the Acholi, to catch, this sub-dividing of the property when the head of the family dies. That is why they say that land is squeezed. You, the cultural leader and other leaders, need to help me educate our people what the Europeans learned long ago. Europeans don't physically fragment wealth. They started long ago to use shares; this helps to sustain family wealth.”

He also appealed to the people of Acholi to support development in their area to stimulate their welfare.

“On the issue of the dairy industry, we are going to promote it. If the Balaalo have shown you that there's money in milk, now you learn it and copy it and we support you.”

Earlier on, the people of Acholi had reported to the President how some Balaalo illegally took over their land and how they mistreat them.

Kilak North Member of Parliament, Hon. Anthony Akol told the President that the Executive Order No. 3. Which he passed clearly

addresses the issues affecting the people of Acholi as far as the Balaalo are concerned.

“You said it very clearly that land in Acholi subregion or Northern Uganda is not owned by individuals and therefore, people have been intimidated here that they are going to refund money to those who bought land here yet those who sold don't have it. People came from IDP camps without resources, they were manipulated, and their land was bought cheaply and now they don't have that money and the people we call Balaalo have now raised the money which they give to some people to tell you that we love the Balaalo, they should not go anywhere,” Hon. Akol noted.

“When we came here last Wednesday, we had like eight people whose gardens had been destroyed by animals. That was Wednesday only but on a daily basis, people’s crops are being destroyed,” the legislator added.

The Amuru District LC5 Chairperson, Mr. Michael Lakony said the matter is no joke and should be dealt with the utmost attention it deserves.

“Your Excellency, you have come to Amuru to restore order and this order is not questionable. We have a local community within Okidi that could not farm because cattle are masquerading and eating their crops,” Mr. Lakony said.

He said the area is one of those which were highly affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and it's now on course of development.

“We cannot be welcomed by masquerading cows that are destroying our only wealth.”

The event was also attended by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Hon. Norbert Mao, the Minister of State for Northern Uganda, Hon. Grace Freedom Kwiwucwiny, Members of Parliament, cultural leaders, among others.

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