

AUTHORITY CHIEF REITERATED THE CALL TO STOP USING PLASTIC BAGS

By Gerald Tenywa

Although this year's UN World Environment Day (June 5) celebrations in Uganda were halted due to the Ebola preventive measures, the message urging Ugandans to make individual contributions towards the environment came out strong.

Speaking during a press conference at the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) House in Kampala on Friday, the agency's executive director, Dr Barirega Akankwasah, appealed to Ugandans to protect the environment in individual capacities to enable future generations to also enjoy the country's beauty and climate.

He defended the ongoing crackdown on people who build in wetlands, describing the operation as lawful and not discriminatory, as alleged.

"Plant at least five trees along the boundary of your land to secure it [your land] and the environment," he said, adding that environmental restoration should not be left to NEMA alone.

NEMA CALLS FOR MINDSET CHANGE TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Akankwasah pointed out that there are big opportunities to plant trees on land belonging to public institutions such as schools, hospitals and road reserves.

This year's celebrations were supposed to take place in the refugee-hosting Adjumani district, but were postponed due to the Ebola preventive

measures that were issued by the Government recently.

The day was marked under the theme: *Climate change Action begins with you. Act now.*

Akankwasah observed that environmental degradation and climate change may be global challenges, but their consequences are felt most at an individual level.

He, therefore, appealed to Ugandans to change habits and embrace



NEMA boss, Dr Barirega Akankwasah

CLARION CALL

Civil society organisations led by the Pan-African Club later in the day organised a session in Makerere-Kavule, where they discussed environmental matters, particularly air and water pollution in Kawempe division, Kampala.

The Kawempe division mayor, Emmanuel Sserunjogi, urged the youth to take up the duty of protecting the environment. He decried environmental degradation by top government officials.

"As leaders, we are doing our best, but our hands are tied. For instance, there is a factory in a wetland in my area that is guarded by soldiers. There is nothing much to do under such circumstances," he said.

Silas Aogon, the Kumi Municipality MP, told the youth from Kawempe to fight environmental pollution, insisting that they have a right to a clean and healthy environment.

environmental protection.

"I separate waste at home. I know we cannot avoid plastic completely because even your phone is partly plastic,

but we should avoid plastic bags. We also used glasses to drink water from a dispenser," Akankwasah said, adding that plastic bags are not allowed at

NEMA House.

Akankwasah further revealed that Uganda's forest cover, which had declined from 24% in 1990 to 9% in 2015, recently rose to 13.9%.

On the ongoing crackdown against wetland encroachers, Akankwasah said the evictions at Eubigi and Busabala wetlands near Kampala are part of the restoration efforts that will escalate to upcountry areas such as Mbale and Mbarara to recover critical ecological systems.

ABOUT THE DAY

First commemorated in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, World Environment Day is supposed to draw global attention to the state of the environment and inspire collective action to protect and restore the planet's ecosystems.

In Uganda, NEMA, with support from the Ministry of Water and Environment, civil society organisations, and the private sector, leads the commemoration, which is usually marked by tree planting, community cleaning, and public awareness campaigns.