

Legal Land Ownership halts Land Conflicts

By Gideon Sanago & Adam Ihucha

President Jakaya Kikwete has announced sweeping reforms, the highlight of which will be the seizure of big tracks of land owned by rich individuals and transfer them to poor, landless people.

The move is aimed at forestalling a land crisis in future. "One controversial trend that may disrupt our stability is the erratic sale of communal land to rich individuals," President Kikwete told Arusha leaders at the end of his tour in the region.

Kikwete said land disputes have the potential to cause chaos, that eventuality has to be avoided. The president said he won't hesitate to revoke a land title deed if by so doing; he would be catering for the interests of poor people and broader national stability.

That exercise would put to an end many land disputes and also dissuade rich people from acquiring large chunks of village certificates of occupancy to the detriment of the welfare of the majority, Kikwete said.

He said experience shows that well-to-do individuals usually capitalized on the ignorance of common people on land issues, to dispossess them of their ancestral land. "These people normally follow all legal procedures required to secure land, so procedure are legal, but the deeds are illegal because they actually dispossess poor people of their ancestral land," President Kikwete explained.

"It is unfair indeed to have internally displaced people, this dishonest move, if left unaddressed, can disrupt peace in the country." He explained. He cited Arusha as one of the areas in the lead in land disputes.

Kikwete was particularly concerned by the schemes of district land officials who turned communal land into commercial commodities. He directed regional authorities to side with common people, to prevent their ancestral land from being grabbed.

All land in Tanzania is held in trust by the President on behalf of all Tanzanians and is therefore public property.

In order to ensure higher security of land tenure, Tanzania has three laws, namely, the Land Act No.4 of 1999, Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999 and the Land Disputes Act No.2 of 2002.

The general purpose of these laws is to make sure that the land policy objectives are achieved.