By Ivan Wakibi

About 30,000 residents of the three villages of Buligo, Bugabwe and Nawansige on the outskirts of Iganga municipality, who are said to have encroached on Busoga University land, are against it being surveyed.

The residents say they have lived on the disputed land for years.

The development comes after the Government announced plans to make the institution a public university. Currently run by the Church of Uganda, the university was closed by the National Council for Higher Education two years ago over irregularities.

During two separate meetings at Bugabwe and Buligo villages, Patrick Kayemba, the Iganga-LC5 chairperson, who is also a member of the committee overseeing the takeover, met the residents to enlighten them on the matter.

Kayemba was accompanied by the deputy district internal security officer, Rajab Nyombi, and Iganga municipality district councillor Zula Nabirye.

Kayemba told the visibly angry locals that Busoga University management claims it has land titles for the unspecified land measuring about 89 acres in Buligo and Kyabagenyi villages. However, Kyabagenyi village is not known in the area.

He said the university had used the land title as security to obtain a sh15b loan from Bank of Baroda, which they failed to service. Kayemba said the Government promised to help them pay back the loan, but wanted to confirm the size of the land and ascertain the number of squatters on it.

He advised the occupants to allow surveyors to determine the land’s boundaries, which he said are not known but affect the three villages.

However, the residents rejected Kayemba’s pleas and vowed not to allow land surveyors to open the boundaries, citing fears of land grabbing.

The furious residents asked Kayemba to probe the existence of Kyabagenyi village and wondered why he had not gone with university officials.

Aloni Kasule, 51, a resident of Bugabwe, said he had lived on the land with his grandparents who were buried there since 1930. He wondered how the University, which started in 1998, obtained the land.

Kasule said his family would suffer if they were displaced without being resettled elsewhere.

Difinzi Kyabogora, 56, a resident of Buligo, said he had lived on the land for over 50 years and had never heard that the university owned the land.

Swabiru Isabire, a resident of Bugabwe, faulted the land ministry and district leadership for allowing the university to get a land title without consulting the residents.

He asked the Government to first ascertain the authenticity of the land title and the process followed by the bank in advancing the loan.

Godfrey Okello, the chairperson of Bugabwe, said since the issue of land came up, residents are scared, which had caused insecurity in the area.

The affected residents have formed a committee and hired lawyers to seek redress in court.