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Port risks losing ships for lack of clear path, warns land agency

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Kenya risks losing ships at the Port of Mombasa if navigational aids leading to the harbour continue being blocked by illegal structures, the National Land Commission (NLC) has warned.

NLC chairman Prof. Muhammad Swazuri, who was on a survey tour of the navigational aids along the Likoni Channel, issued a two-week notice to residents to vacate and give a clear path for the vessels calling the port.

Prof Swazuri said Kenya risks losing business to other ports such as that of Tanzania if the navigational aids remain obscured by the illegal developments coming in the area.

“We got reports from the Kenya Maritime Authority (KMA) in 2013, that ships were having difficulties in identifying beacons to their routes as they enter and exit the Port of Mombasa and that is a threat to maritime traffic, and it threatens business at the port,” he said.

He noted that the International Maritime Organization had threatened to stop vessels from coming to the port because of the poor visibility of the beacons that aid navigation into the Kilindini Harbour.

The chairman said his commission has a list of 31 plots that are on the navigation paths.

The commission issued a notice in January 18, 2018 for the individuals to surrender the sites and vacate the parcels within 90 days.

“Some of the lands are built up areas like near State House, Old Town, Old Nyali Bridge, and Bofa in Kilifi, Malindi. All these are within people’s houses, which is an illegality,” the NLC chairman said.

He spoke while on a survey tour in Likoni area of Senti Kumi to map the exact locations of some of the navigational aids. He was accompanied by the Kenya Maritime Authority Director George Okong’o.

“If we don’t have enough navigational aids, then ships are likely not to come here. This will mean loss to Kenya and the entire east and central region. These aids were put here in the early 1920s so it is not possible that people were allocated this land at that time. They were reserved for the lights,” Prof. Swazuri added.

He ordered that structures within six-metre radius from the navigation aids, be demolished by February 9.

“We shall now mark the route that is supposed to be cleared and we want those within the six-metre corridor to vacate. The agencies will be here by February 8 and if nothing will have been done, we will have the agencies demolish the structures,” he warned.

He said they will continue with the similar operations in Kilifi and Malindi in future.

Mr Okong’o said they have been receiving complaints from ship captains who are unable to see the navigation beacons from the waiting areas in the sea.

He said the structures have made it difficult to differentiate the light from nearby houses and that from the navigation aids.

“We are basically courting a disaster if the ship captains cannot not get a clear view. Chances of the vessel going aground are very high. This is a very serious issue of obstruction,” he said.

The residents have, however, asked for compensation and more time to relocate complaining that the notice was too short.