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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**REPEAT BUGOMA FOREST BOUNDARY OPENING, SAVE BUGOMA FOREST  
CAMPAIGN DEMANDS**

Members of the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC) have written to the Minister of Lands demanding that opening of the Bugoma forest boundaries is repeated. This call has come after the Ministry of Lands and National Forestry Authority (NFA) commenced opening of the Bugoma forest boundaries in November 2021.

The boundary opening stalled in December 2021 after unknown people uprooted some mark stones that had been used in the demarcation process by the Ministry of Lands. Information available to the SBFC indicates that the boundary opening is set to commence again and will be concluded this month.

The boundary opening exercise, which was aimed at protecting Bugoma forest from land grabbing, has been marred by several flaws that have endangered conservation of the forest.

Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, the chairperson of the SBFC, says, “Cabinet directed the Ministry of Lands and NFA to open the Bugoma forest boundaries in 2019. To ensure that action was taken, the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign held meetings with NFA and the Ministry of Lands in 2020 and 2021. The campaign members demanded that the ministry opens the Bugoma forest boundaries.”

He adds, “In the meetings with the Ministry of Lands, we agreed that certain things needed to be done to ensure that the boundary opening exercise is transparent and free of selfish interests. The Ministry of Lands did not act on the commitments it made and we are fearful that the secret boundary opening is aimed at formally facilitating the grabbing of Bugoma forest land.”

Some of the matters that were agreed on between the SBFC and Ministry of Lands during meetings held in Kampala in February and October 2021 include:

- The Ministry of Lands agreed to invite stakeholders including the SBFC, Institution of Surveyors-Uganda (ISU), Uganda Law Society (ULS), Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) and others to participate in the boundary opening exercise to ensure independent oversight for credible results.
- The ministry also agreed to share the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Bugoma boundary opening with the SBFC.

- Further, it was agreed that the SBFC would work with the survey team to mobilise and sensitise communities to appreciate and participate in the boundary opening exercise.
- In addition, it was agreed that both the ministry and SBFC would continue sharing relevant information on the Bugoma forest boundary opening with each other.
- During the boundary opening itself, the Ministry of Lands agreed to periodically share information on the exercise with the public to build public trust and confidence in the exercise.

When the ministry and NFA commenced on the boundary opening exercise in November 2021 however, the above commitments were not kept.

“The SBFC was not formally invited to participate in the boundary opening exercise. We are unaware of any invitations being extended to the Institution of Surveyors, Uganda Law Society and Inter-religious Council of Uganda to participate in the boundary opening exercise.

Without the independent oversight by those groups, there are fears that the ongoing boundary opening will be used to legitimise and support groups that are interested in grabbing Bugoma forest land,” Mr. Joshua Mutale of the SBFC says.

He adds, “The SBFC cannot sit back and watch the secret boundary opening as it goes on. This is why we are demanding that the Ministry of Lands starts the boundary opening afresh alongside independent stakeholders.”

It is notable that over three individuals and companies including Hoima Sugar Ltd, MZ Agencies and others have laid claim to over 10,000 hectares of Bugoma forest.

Mr. Hassan Mugenyi, the chairperson of the SBFC local community taskforce, says, “We had hoped that as promised, the Ministry of Lands would hold community meetings in which as many people as possible would be reached in order to sensitise us. This would have helped us to participate in the boundary opening.”

He adds, “However, without sensitising communities, surveyors went into people’s gardens to demarcate the Bugoma forest boundaries. The communities were not happy with this. They could have exercised their constitutional right to protest against individuals accessing their land without any notice but they feared the armed security personnel that the surveyors were moving with.”

Ms. Lamurah Asasiira, a local leader who also belongs to the SBFC, notes, “The surveyors destroyed our people’s gardens. Crops of 378 families from 15 villages in Kyangwali and other sub-counties in Kikuube district were destroyed. Families are now faced with the problem of hunger as their food was destroyed.”

In addition to calling on the Ministry of Lands to urgently begin the Bugoma forest boundary opening afresh alongside independent stakeholders such as ISU, SBFC, IRCU, local communities and others, the SBFC is also calling on the Ministry of Lands to compensate the families whose crops were destroyed.

**ENDS**

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