



April 27, 2023

H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni,
The President,
Republic of Uganda,
Kampala (U).

Your Excellency,

RE: REQUEST TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES FACED BY BUGOMA FOREST

The above refers

Greetings from the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC), a coalition of civil society organisations (CSOs) and private sector players whose main objective is to save Bugoma forest from land grabbing and sugarcane growing threats. We take this opportunity to appreciate the efforts being undertaken by government to promote conservation of forests and biodiversity in Uganda.

Recently, the Government of Uganda (GoU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the European Union (EU) delegation in Uganda to support joint efforts to conserve Uganda's forest resources. This is commendable.

In addition, in January 2023 at the spudding ceremony for the Kingfisher oil project in Kikuube district, you criticized the destruction of Bugoma forest, noting that forests are more important than oil. You promised to work with the National Forestry Authority (NFA) to facilitate the mapping of Bugoma forest and to arrest the forest encroachers.

This instilled hope in the forest host communities as well as Ugandans who want to save the forest from the ongoing destruction. However, since you made the above promise, no action has been taken to stop destruction of the forest. Through this letter, the SBFC would like to share updates on Bugoma forest with you. The SBFC also requests that you take urgent action to stop the destruction of the forest.

UPDATES

Between January and April 2023, members of the SBFC including local communities held meetings with the Bugoma forest host communities and identified the following emerging issues:

- (a) **Forest destruction ongoing:** Your Excellency, following your promise to end the destruction of Bugoma forest as well as following GoU signing a forest partnership with

the EU in Uganda, we had hoped that more efforts would be undertaken to protect Bugoma and other forests. However, the destruction of the forest continues with sugarcane, maize growing, charcoal burning and illegal logging going on in the forest.

- (b) **Misinformation spread:** In addition, the forest host communities report that bad elements are selling plots of land in Bugoma forest to community members. These elements say that you, the president, want Bugoma forest to be completely destroyed as it could harbour rebels if it is left intact. This information is wrong but the bad elements use it to hoodwink communities into buying forest land, thereby worsening destruction of the forest.
- (c) **Restoration efforts delayed:** Further, in September 2022, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) issued an order through which the authority noted that Hoima Sugar Ltd had violated conditions in its Environmental and Social Impact (ESIA) certificate of approval for its Kyangwali Mixed Land Use project. Notably, NEMA noted that areas earmarked for natural forested, ecotourism and other purposes had been severely degraded. NEMA ordered that Hoima Sugar Ltd restores 4,854.7 hectares/18.73 sq. miles of the forest. The restoration efforts (tree planting in particular) were yet to start by April 2023 however.
- (d) **Further destruction:** Instead, the forest host communities report that further destruction of the forest is ongoing with areas where sugarcane is not supposed to be grown being cleared. Communities also report that tree stumps in the forest are being coated with fossil fuels to ensure that the forest never regenerates. There are fears that the whole of Bugoma forest could be destroyed. This is unfortunate and you should not allow it to happen!
- (e) **Boundary reopening report unpublicised:** Your Excellency, between 2021 and 2022, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) together with NFA embarked on a boundary re-opening exercise of Bugoma forest. While the exercise that started in November 2021 stalled in December of the same year, the exercise recommenced in 2022. The public is eagerly awaiting results from the boundary re-opening exercise, which remain secret to date.

Recommendations

To address the above challenges, the SBFC makes the following recommendations:

- i. **Your Excellency should order the relevant government** agencies to conduct investigations into allegations that your name is being used to trick communities to buy land in Bugoma forest. All people that are found to have participated in the above-mentioned scam should be prosecuted in line with the law.
- ii. **In addition, we request you to task the MLHUD to publicly** release the report from the 2021-2022 Bugoma forest boundary re-opening exercise.

iii. **Furthermore, we are requesting you to engage NEMA** and other relevant government agencies to ensure that the restoration of Bugoma forest is fasttracked and that the ongoing destruction stops.

iv. **Finally, the €152 million (Shs624 billion) that the GoU received** from the EU in Uganda to promote sustainable management of forests should prioritise restoration of forests such as Bugoma and others across the country.

Thank you,

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Dickens Kamugisha,
Chairperson, Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC)

OTHER SBFC SIGNATORIES

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CC

- The Head of Delegation, European Union (EU)
- The Speaker, Parliament of Uganda
- The Prime Minister of Uganda
- The Executive Director, NFA
- The Executive Director, NEMA
- The Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development
- The Minister of Water and Environment
- The Chairperson, Natural Resources Committee of Parliament
- All MPs from Bunyoro