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Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja has ordered encroachers to leave the 41,144-hectare Bugoma National Park. She declared all settlements established after its 1932 gazettement illegal and facing eviction.

She warned the mighty or the untouchables, including soldiers and companies, namely Hoima Sugar Limited and MZ Agencies, to leave Bugoma and give way to the restoration of the forest.

"All encroachers, whether small or medium or big or extra-large, should get out of Bugoma," she said, attracting thunderous cheers from the local leaders, district officials, and conservationists.

She also warned that encroachers cultivating maize in Bugoma Central Forest Reserve should not expect to harvest their crops, saying such appeals are merely delaying tactics aimed at frustrating the eviction process.

Nabbanja made the remarks during the official handover of Bugoma by the National Forestry Authority (NFA) in the Ministry of Water and Environment to the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) in the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities on Saturday.

The ceremony follows a directive by President Yoweri Museveni on February 23, this year, to NFA to hand over Bugoma to UWA. Museveni's directive sparked off a series of meetings and this will be followed by a number of events that will culminate in a resolution of Parliament

BUGOMA IS NOW A NATIONAL PARK



Nabbanja looks on in disbelief at the charcoal burning kiln inside the degraded Bugoma Central Forest reserve. She handed over Bugoma to UWA on Saturday. (Scan picture using the VDE to watch video)

gazetting Bugoma as a national park.

Museveni's directive was aimed at stopping environmental destruction, evicting encroachers and strengthening conservation efforts in one of Uganda's most important ecological systems. It was sent to Nabbanja and copied to the environment minister, tourism minister, UWA and the NFA.

BUGOMA IS CRITICAL

The Prime Minister said the forest belongs to wildlife and is important for the protection of ecological systems, such as rivers and absorbing waste gases, such as carbon dioxide that are behind the changing

BETWEEN THE LINES

○ The Kikuube district vice-chairperson, Vincent Opio, said in 2022, the district council resolved that Bugoma Forest be taken by Uganda Wildlife Authority.

climate. Bugoma is also home to endangered animals, including chimpanzees, birds, such as the Nahan's Francolin; and rare monkeys known as the Mangabeyes, as well as various tree species.

Nabbanja also described Bugoma as a strategic investment that is critical to the achievement of the National

Development Plan and Parish Development Model.

She said most Ugandans depend on rain-fed agriculture, and the destruction of Bugoma is going to affect food security and livelihoods.

Nabbanja noted that Bugoma is an engine for the tenfold growth economic strategy. Tourism is one of the sectors of the economy that will help to grow Uganda's Gross Domestic Product 10 times. Others are agro-industrialisation, oil and minerals and science and technology.

She directed the lands ministry to work with the of tourism ministry to open the boundaries of the 41,144 hectares under Bugoma.

Nabbanja also directed the environment ministry to write a comprehensive handover report.

KIKUUBE GIVES GREEN LIGHT

Vincent Opio, the Kikuube district vice-chairperson, said in 2022, the district council resolved that the forest be taken by UWA, adding that as district leaders, they are happy that their dream has been achieved.

He was optimistic that turning the forest into a national park would restore it.

Opio promised that the district is going to give full support to UWA to ensure that the forest is protected for the next generation.

However, he called for clear boundaries to avoid conflicts between the community and UWA, adding that they should put in place an electric fence to avoid human and wildlife conflicts.

Godwin Angalia, the Kikuube resident commissioner, welcomed the initiative, saying it is going to help in the protection and restoration of the forest.

Florence Natumanya, the Kikuube district woman representative in Parliament, said the protection of Bugoma Forest is critical in promoting conservation and fighting against climate change.

She commended the Government for the decision, but requested that farmers who had already planted maize in

the forest land to be given a grace period to harvest.

NFA HANDS OVER

Boaz Basigirenda, who is the range manager of Budonga system under NFA, which covers 43 forest reserves in Bunyoro sub-region, including Bugoma, said he was not objecting to the decision of UWA taking over the forest since it was the President's directive.

Basigirenda said Bugoma was safe, until 2015, when Bunyoro Kitara kingdom leased 22 square miles to Hoima Sugar Ltd in the area.

He noted that over 364 cases were registered at different police stations, emanating from people encroaching on the forest.

Basigirenda added that there has been an influx of people who have been encroaching on the forest, claiming they have been operating on investors' land and NFA got overwhelmed.

He also asked for support from police and Uganda People's Defence Forces to promote conservation.

UWA TAKES CHARGE

UWA's executive director, Dr James Musinguzi said they are going to restore Bugoma and also promote tourism in the reserve, which is expected to generate revenue, which will be shared with the communities surrounding Bugoma.