Makerere University. Of these, ... a respiratory tract infection in December 2013. In the citation congratulate you upon this well-deserved award, the ... "The Mandela family indeed gave their all for Africa. They ... deliver and ensure that you produce competitive graduates and research. I am ... decades now dominate the global culture and economy," he said.

I gave away Kajjansi forest reserve, top NFA boss confesses

BY BETTY AMAMUKIRORI

Gershom Onyango, the chairperson of National Forestry Authority (NFA) board of directors has said he gave away Kajjansi Central Forest reserve to businessmen and brothers Ephraim Ntaganda and Cedric Songonza.

"The fault lies with me. I made a mistake of allowing the persons to acquire land to work on it. I accept I made the mistake and take responsibility for it," he told the commission of inquiry into land matters when presented with documentary evidence on the giveway.

He also revealed that he gave the land to Logistics Real Estate Limited, a company owned by Ntaganda and International Camping Site and Spa Resort Limited, owned by Songonza, without consulting directors of the board and management.

"At the time of giving a letter of no objection to the companies, I had not consulted members of the board. I single handedly received, analysed and decided on the letter of request for the land," he responded to Justice Catherine Bamugemereire's question on whether the decision was made unanimously by the board members.

Kajjansi Central Forest Reserve was leased to 46 tree farmers in the late 1980s to plant trees. According to Oyango, the licenses were given for five years, which were renewable ,but not transferrable. Every year, each farmer paid sh5,000 per hectare to the authority.

"The trees belonged to the farmers, but the land belonged to NFA," said the 69-year-old former NFA executive director while being guided by the commission's assistant lead counsel, John Bosco Suuza.

During the testimony on Friday at the National records and archives centre in Wandegeya, Onyango said farmers sold off their interests to Songonza and a one Bob Kanaabi without NFA knowledge.

"NFA sought legal advice from the Solicitor General who said the transactions were null and void," he said, adding that they are yet to respond to the application for license.

Asked why he is still holding onto the application, he said they have instead constituted a committee to verify the farmers who allegedly sold off their interests.

On the forest degradation, Onyango said they tried to stop the process, but another group, led by a one Eriya Mubiru, showed up with a court order that they own the land.

However, Suuza refuted his claims with several email correspondences between him and the Solicitor General.

According to documents before the commission, on December 20, 2011, he, while acting as executive director, wrote to Ntaganda a letter of no objection to acquire and develop the land. It had no guideline as to how the land should be used.

The commission revealed that the forest reserve was fraudulently given away to the two brothers, Songonza and Ntaganda, by Onyango in connivance with the current NFA executive director, Michael Mugisa and some of the officials within the authority.

Bamugemereire, the commission's chairperson, said this could be the reason why he re-appointed Mugisa as the executive director, but he refuted the claims.

She revealed that Ntaganda has sold about 68.12 hectares (about 168 acres) of the land to Mubiru at US$2.5m (about sh9b). The total land area of the forest is approximately 450 acres.

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