

MANSA SAID HE HAD SPENT OVER SH250M TO BUY THE LAND AND BRIBE OFFICIALS AT THE LAND BOARD

By Paul Watala

Kampala city-based businessman Hamisi Mansa was on Wednesday detained at Mbale Central Police Station after being grilled over grabbing 4.5 acres of forest land in Mbale town.

Mansa, 45, a businessman operating a hardware shop at Nakasero Market in Kampala was arrested on the orders of the commission of inquiry into land management led by Justice Catherine Bamugemereire. By press time yesterday, he was still under Police custody.

The commission is holding public hearings at the Resort Hotel in Mbale town.

Mansa had appeared before the commission to explain why and how he had acquired 4.5 acres of land in the forest reserve located in Busamaga, a suburb of Mbale municipality.

At first, Mansa appeared reluctant to answer questions posed by the commissioners a move which displeased the probe team. Sensing that the situation was heating up, Mansa opened up.

He was tasked with revealing the people he deals with in the land grabbing. However, he only named a person who is deceased. This did not go well with the commissioners.

When the probe team pushed harder, he relented and revealed that he had spent over sh250m to buy the land and bribing different officials at the district land board and the lands ministry to acquire the land title.

"I have now realised that matters are serious, so my Lord, let me tell you the truth. We always use middlemen that spy for us and help us and we give them money to process the documents," Mansa said.

"I used Michael Magala from the National Forestry Authority (NFA)

Kampala businessman detained over land grabbing



Hamisi Mansa

"I used Michael Magala from the NFA office to send a bribe of sh7m from the initial sh20m that had been asked by the district surveyor, Edson Namala, to help me survey and access documents." Mansa

could be using him to scout for open spaces in the town and strike deals.

"We have heard that some unscrupulous people have deployed scouts in town to spy on open spaces and government land that is idle and give information and they start processing documents with help of the lands ministry officials," Bamugemereire added.

She said land grabbers use Mansa as litmus test to see if the Government will react, adding that some well-positioned Mbale municipality authorities were playing tricks to grab forest land.

Bamugemereire also said after Mansa acquired the title of the forest land, he went ahead to cut down trees in the forest, hence destroying the environment. She said it was a crime to cut down trees belonging to the Government.

"The commission also learnt that Mansa was a wanted man by the Police and IGG over the same land. We have documents indicating that Mansa was ordered to vacate and stop any development on the forest land, but all in vain," Bamugemereire said.

"Mansa, you seem to have enough to inform this commission and since you stay in Kampala and are able to flee, so let me hand you over to the security for safe custody as we continue with investigations," she said.

Commissioner Robert Ssebunnya said Mansa is a courageous land grabber that does not respect the law and was ready to use his money to bribe officials to acquire land at any cost.

However, the Mbale district surveyor, Edson Namala, while appearing before the commission later, denied allegation of asking for bribe from

Mansa, adding that he had never been in direct contact with Mansa.

"I have received numerous death threats from land grabbers in Mbale because I have always refused to co-operate with them to strike deals to grab land. My Lord, allow me to reveal to you that I have been forced to retire at the age of 38 years," Namala said.

"The land grabbers have connived with some leaders at the district to process my early retirement and I received a letter informing me to prepare for retirement just after 10 years in service. I tried to seek the chief administrative officer's attention but I was told that I stepped on peoples toes," Namala said.

Namala revealed that unscrupulous land grabbers have on several occasions tried to bribe him with money and even promised to allocate him plots of land in case he agreed to survey the open spaces or forest land.

Bamugemereire warned selfish municipality authorities against cutting down forests with the intention of expanding the town and pledged to fight the vice as long as she is still heading the land inquiry.

"You cannot continue destroying the environment at the cost of expanding the town. Mbale leaders are conniving with land grabbers to steal government land, claiming they want to expand the town," Bamugemereire said.

It is alleged that Mafabi on