

# Petroleum dealer surrenders Mabira forest reserve land

By Andante Okanya  
and Edward Anyoli

The proprietor of Hared Petroleum Limited has surrendered three-quarters of a 5.7-acre piece of land in Mabira forest, after conceding that it is government land.

Bashir Yusuf was yesterday appearing before the land probe committee public hearing conducted at the Archives and Records Centre in Kampala.

Prior, National Forestry Authority (NFA) officer Michael Ojja, who is Lwankima NFA sector manager, under which Mabira is administered, accused the Hared boss of encroachment. Mabira forest covers 29,972 hectares.

Yusuf's action was prompted by intense prodding from the probe team, chaired by Court of Appeal Justice Catherine Bamugemereire. She stressed that the commission's investigations had concluded that majority of the land was government land.

When commissioner George Bagonza said Yusuf could have been fleeced by his agents, he responded that his appearance at the commission had made him realise his mistake.

"I now realise that it was a bad deal. It happens in business," said Yusuf, who was flanked by his lawyer Shaban Muziransa.

The businessman explained that he had intended to establish a filling station, motel, and a truck parking yard. However, he said NFA has since planted trees on the land.

Yusuf was tasked with explaining how he acquired a title in a Mabira Central Forest Reserve land, registered as Plot 47 FRV MK 025 Folio 16 Block 284, Najjembe. It is located near the Najjembe Police post.



Hared Petroleum managing director Bashir Yusuf appearing before the land probe committee yesterday. Photo by Denis Dibebe

*Yusuf wanted to establish a filling station, motel and truck parking yard on the forest land*

The registered owners on the certificate of title are Bashir Yusuf and Noordin Yusuf. They obtained the title in December 2013.

Asked how he got interested in the land, Yusuf responded that he asked his agent, a one Peter Mugoya, to search for

land along the Kampala-Jinja highway.

Yusuf said he got assurances from his agent and lawyers that the land was free and not part of the Mabira land managed by NFA. He said he followed the requisite steps and paid sh1m to Buikwe District Land Board, and sh2.5m as compensation to about 12 tenants for the crops they had on the land.

However, assistant lead counsel John Bosco Suuza noted that the application to the district land board was faulty from the onset. He said Yusuf should have followed the due process of the law and inquired about the land's history from the neighbours, including the Police station.

Bamugemereire said: "This is a no-go area. Your title should be cancelled. People should respect government land."

The other commissioners are Frederick Ruhindi, Mary Oduka Ochan, Robert Ssebunya, Joyce Habaasa, Dr Rose Nakayi and George Bagonza.

Ebert Byenkya is the lead counsel, while Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya (High Court Judge designate) heads the secretariat.

#### Commission mandate

The commission's mandate is to probe efficiency of the laws, policies and processes of land registration, acquisition, administration and management.

It is also tasked with inquiring the effectiveness of the Uganda Land Commission in administering public land and relevant bodies in the reservation of wetlands, forests, road reserves, and national parks, among other gazetted areas.



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