

NFA boss grilled over giveaway of forest land

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GULU. The Commission of Inquiry into Land Matters yesterday grilled National Forestry Authority (NFA) executive director Michael Mugisha for alleged illegal giveaway of parts of Gulu Central Forest Reserve land.

Mr Mugisha appeared before the probe committee headed by Justice Catherine Bamugemereire to answer queries related to the encroachment and degradation of parts of 93 hectares of the forest reserve.

During the public hearing in Gulu Town, Mr Ebert Byenkya, the Commission's lead counsel, said they had visited the forest reserve land and established that NFA illegally granted permission to Gulu University to construct its Faculty of Medicine in 2006 on 29 hectares of the land.

Mr Byenkya added that the Commission also found out that part of the land was also issued out and used to construct a students' hostel belonging to Green Parks Ltd.

"How did this happen in the central forest reserve? Under which law can NFA license a forest land to private individuals and perhaps give the forest reserve to Gulu University without parliamentary approval?" Mr Byenkya said.

The Commission also accused NFA of making illegal earnings in ground rent from the structures erected on the forest reserve land.

Mr Byenkya cited a July 27, 2015 letter authored by Mr Mugisha to the management of Green Parks Ltd, demanding them to pay rent.

The probe also found out that NFA illegally gave away six hectares of the forest reserve land to SOS for establishment of a children's village in 2006 while six hectares are still being occupied by locals who camped in the area at the height of LRA insurgency.

Mr Mugisha admitted that the land was given away without approval of Parliament but said the allocation was done before he took over office.

However, he said the briefings he received indicated that the situation by 2006 warranted NFA officials to allocate the land since Gulu University was a public institution.

Justice Bamugemereire queried NFA's capability to manage forests, saying there has been massive forest degradation across the country.

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