

# WEMNET-UGANDA

*An informed society that values, conserves and protects the environment.*

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **CSO URGENT CALL ON RENEWED POSITION TO DEFEND AND PROTECT BUGOMA CENTRAL FOREST RESERVE GIVE AWAY AND LAND GRAB**

Today, Wemnet Uganda joins the Save Bugoma forest Campaign (SBFC) and other environmental activists around the world to commemorate World Environment Day (WED). We take this opportunity to highlight the plight of Bugoma CFR and other protected reserves that are under threat such as Namanve CFR, Nonve, and Kitubulu and also call upon conservationists from all walks of life to re-think their position and join civic actions for the defence and protection of Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR) give away and land grab.

On this day, 5 June, 5 2024 Uganda will join the rest of the world to commemorate the World Environment Day. The day`s theme focuses on Land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience.

It is in light of the above that as Wemnet Uganda, we observe that the theme also fits well within the on-going call towards government and duty bearers to stop the continued land grab and instead focus on restoring Bugoma forest land.

We further note that, instead of taking action to have the forest land restored to allow rejuvenation of the forest cover, those in illegal possession of forest land acting with impunity and working with those in authority have resorted to threatening and/or arresting and subsequent imprisonment of those speaking about Bugoma forest land grab.

The arrest and detention of various individuals coupled with constant deployment of armed security personnel to protect the Bugoma forest destroyers has not only led to consistent destruction of the forest, it has threatened conservationists from engagements in regard to defending and protecting the forest. Many of our colleagues have over the years been arrested and charged with trumped up charges just because they speak up for BCFR. Some have been languishing in police cells, arrested and incarcerated under different and fictitious names to prevent their lawyers and family members from tracing their whereabouts.

As a result of this, many of our colleagues especially those in Kikuube and Hoima District have since opted to remain silent and watch as the forest reserve is being destroyed for fear of being implicated and/or face flimsy charges of criminal trespassing and incitement to violence. Because of the threats, accessing the forest to ascertain its status is almost impossible due to the

presence of armed security personnel guarding the investments of the forest degraders and grabbers.

As civil society partners under the Save Bugoma campaign, we are discouraged that the efforts by both state and non-state actors as well as the space to defend and protect Bugoma forest continue to shrink.

For these reasons, we respectfully call on the government of Uganda, all stakeholders to re-think their positions in addressing the plight of Bugoma forest reserve as we commemorate World Environment Day.

Specifically, we call for:

- a) **Cancel all the illegal land titles:** Cancel all illegal and fraudulent land titles in Bugoma forest and other protected reserves like Namanve, Nonve and Kitubulu among others.
- b) **Verify the Bugoma CFR area:** Government should make public the leaked boundary survey report to show whether the forest land still exists and, if not, where part of the forest land is.
- c) **Stop intimidating environmental activists:** Stop intimidating activists challenging the illegal giveaway of forest land with trumped-up charges to silence them.
- d) **Tackle corruption:** Corruption hindering conservation efforts should be tackled, especially prosecuting those issuing illegal certificates in forest lands without parliamentary de-gazetting.
- e) **Land Restoration of Bugoma CFR and other protected areas;** We call upon the government to ensure that all land on which Bugoma CFR sits and other protected areas such as Namanve CFR, are urgently restored to their previous states including, evicting all encroachers, re-planting trees, and protecting the said forests

Therefore, we urge the Government of Uganda to consider these concerns and take appropriate action to protect Bugoma CFR and other critical forest reserves in Uganda.

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