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Conservationists vow to 'give everything' to save Mabira forest

TUESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2013 12:24 BY RONALD MUSOKE

Conservationists led by the executive director of the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)'s Frank Muramuzi have accused President Museveni of being 'dishonest' to Ugandans when he recently hinted that he would revive his intention to give away part of Mabira rain forest to the Mehta group of companies, the proprietors of the Sugar Corporation of Uganda Limited (SCOUL).

Speaking to journalists on Jan. 14, Muramuzi said that a group of civil society advocates who were opposed to giving away Mabira in 2007 met Museveni then and they all agreed to leave the forest intact owing to its importance.

In 2007, the government led by President Museveni was determined to give away up to 7,000 ha of Mabira Forest to Mehta to expand his sugar estate but met stiff resistance from civil society and many Ugandans. On April 12 of the same year, a demonstration held in Kampala left three people dead, including an Indian.

Muramuzi said he was surprised to hear the president resurrect the idea to carve part of the forest for sugar cane growing during a recent retreat at Kyankwanzi with NRM MPs.

"We are not happy and we shall give everything including our lives to make sure that this forest is not given away and that it is saved for future generations," Muramuzi said.

Meanwhile, Atim Beatrice Anywar, the Woman MP for Kitgum District who gained popularity for fighting against the give-away of the forest and received the moniker, 'Mama Mabira' said that her pressure group, the 'Save Mabira Crusade' are ready to counter the president's idea.

"We are alerting the President and informing all Ugandans that we are committed to do everything legally possible to save Mabira forest," said Anywar.

Anywar also announced that activists have again agreed to call countrywide demonstrations aimed at stopping what they see as further degradation of Uganda's shrinking forest cover.

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