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### Uganda: Makerere Protests Mabira Sale

**The Monitor (Kampala)**

**September 26, 2006**

Posted to the web September 25, 2006

Mercy Nalugo & Steven Kibuuka  
Kampala

Students from Makerere University Faculty of Forestry and Nature Conservation yesterday took to the streets protesting the planned sale of Mabira Forest to an investor.

The students, who petitioned Parliament yesterday, said they were not certain of their future since they were being trained to conserve forests yet the government's plan is to sell them.

The group comprised of over 300 students.

#### The march

Led by a band, they marched from Makerere University, through the city to Parliament where they presented a petition to the Speaker Mr Edward Ssekandi.

The students, headed by Mr Lawrence Faita, said in their petition that degazetting Mabira Forest and other forests could have harmful consequences for both the people and the environment.



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"It is to our dismay that the government now dreams of degazetting the only pocket of a tropical forest remaining in Uganda without knowing the paramount importance that Mabira forest plays to the surrounding communities and our nation at large," reads the petition in part.



The government last month decided to allocate 7,100 hectares (approximately 25%) of Mabira forestland to the Sugar Corporation Of Uganda Limited.

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But environmentalists headed by the National Environment Management Authority are opposed to the decision.

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The students noted that forests cover about 27 per cent of the world's land area compared to the previous 50 per cent 10,000 years ago.

Faita said Mabira has precious resources that must be given sustainable management if the people and the environment, which they depend upon, are to remain healthy.

Mr Ronald Kafiire, another student said they were among the aggrieved party.

### A drying Uganda

"Look, Uganda is dry with lake Victoria being the latest one to decrease in its water levels. If we dare give away our only saviour, then we are bound to become a desert," he said.

Some carried placards that read, "Sugar can be imported to Uganda and not Mabira Forest. Save Mabira from sugarcane plantation. Listen to the profession and the voices, let the sugar canes be grown in the bare lands of Karamoja because Mabira is our pride."

Ssekandi said Parliament has not officially been informed of the plan to degazette the forest.

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"But if it is true, I promise your views will be considered," he said.

He said the government would make an explanation before Parliament's Natural Resources Committee in case the government decided to sell Mabira.

The students handed to Ssekandi a T-shirt with words sending a message to the government not to sell Mabira.

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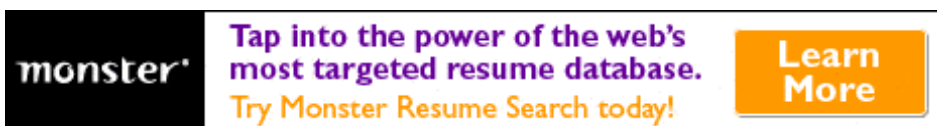
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