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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
KAMPALA & KIKUUBE**

**NEMA MUST ENSURE HOIMA SUGAR LIMITED RESTORES BUGOMA FOREST**

Today, as various actors across the globe mark the international Earth day we write to the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) requesting that the authority avail CERAI, partners and public with a copy of the approved restoration plan for Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR), which is found in Kikuube district in Western Uganda.

CERAI works with Bugoma forest host communities, civil society and private sector to defend Bugoma CFR from land grabbing, sugarcane growing and oil threats.

CERAI is also calling on NEMA and the National Forestry Authority (NFA) to ensure that Hoima Sugar Limited (HSL) halts all its destructive activities in Bugoma CFR and restores the forest.

**BACKGROUND**

Despite protestations from NFA, Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), Kikuube District Local Government (KDLG), civil society and the general public, NEMA authorized HSL's activities in Bugoma forest in August 2020.

The authority illegally and irregularly issued an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of approval allowing HSL to do the following in Bugoma forest:

- I. Set up a sugarcane plantation on 9.24sq. miles;
- II. Develop an urban centre on 1.206 sq. miles;
- III. Set up an ecotourism site on 1.97 sq. miles;
- IV. Land for a cultural site covering 0.156 sq. miles; and
- V. Leave a natural forested area and set up nature trails on 6.17 sq. miles.

While NEMA allowed HSL to grow sugarcane in some parts of Bugoma forest, reports by the SBFC in January 2021 and investigations by NEMA in September 2022 showed that the company had grown sugarcane in the area reserved for ecotourism purposes. The area reserved for natural forested purposes was also degraded.

In September 2022, NEMA [acknowledged](#) that HSL had violated condition 4.3 (i)(c) contained in the company's ESIA certificate of approval. NEMA therefore exercised her powers under section 129 of the National Environment Act, 2019 and among others, directed as follows:

- I. That HSL immediately stops any further destruction of the natural reserved forest area, eco-tourism area, cultural site and the land reserved for an urban centre;
- II. That no sugarcane is planted in the above-mentioned areas;
- III. That no urban centre is developed;
- IV. That HSL restores all the degraded areas of the natural reserved forest area, ecotourism area, cultural area and land reserved for an urban centre at its own cost; and
- V. That Hoima Sugar prepares a restoration plan for the degraded areas of Bugoma forest in consultation with the Forestry Sector Support Department of the Ministry of Water and Environment (FSSD), NFA and UWA and submits the same to NEMA for approval within a period of not more than three months from the date of the aforementioned order.

“Over seven months have elapsed since NEMA ordered Hoima Sugar to submit a restoration plan. While the forest host communities and the public are highly interested in the restoration of Bugoma forest, NEMA has not publicly shared the restoration plan that Hoima Sugar submitted to the authority, if any was,” Mr. Gerald Barekye, the Executive Director CERAI, says.

He adds, “NEMA must build goodwill and show that it is interested in promoting public participation in forest conservation by publicly disclosing the restoration order. The forest must also be restored and all destructive activities by Hoima Sugar Ltd stopped.”

Mr. Ainomugisha Joan, a resident of Kikuube, “We do not know if any restoration plan for Bugoma exists. If it does, we were not consulted on it yet as people who have lived near Bugoma forest for a long time and have enjoyed benefits from the forest, we are interested in conservation of the forest. We can also share information to inform restoration of the forest.”

Ms. Moses Ayebare who lives near Bugoma forest says, “Women are very unhappy that Bugoma forest from which we used to get free herbs and which brought us rain is being destroyed. We are worried that if the forest is not restored and the destruction by Hoima Sugar continues, government will not be able to stop other encroachers and the entire forest will be destroyed.”

## **BUGOMA FOREST’S TOURISM POTENTIAL**

[Research](#) conducted by the Inclusive Green Economy Network, East Africa (IGEN-EA) to determine the tourism potential of Bugoma forest, showed that the forest has immense potential. The research found the following:

- That Bugoma forest is home to tourist attractions including 570 or 11.4% of Uganda’s chimpanzees, 225 bird species, the Uganda Mangabey, bush elephants and others.
- That entities such as Jane Goodall Institute were engaged in habituation of chimpanzees and the Ugandan Mangabey to make them reading for trekking (tourist visits). The habituation of chimpanzees was expected to be completed early in 2023.
- Further, that tourist activities such as chimpanzee and Uganda Mangabey trekking, forest walks, tree climbing and others could be promoted in the forest.
- In addition, that if the above activities were promoted, Bugoma forest could earn the country more than half a million dollars a year.
- Over 90% of tour operators who participated in the study were willing to sell tourism experiences within Bugoma forest.

## **CONCLUSION**

To save Bugoma forest, CERAI recommends the following:

1. NEMA should share a copy of the approved restoration plan for Bugoma forest by HSL.
2. The ongoing destruction of Bugoma forest should be immediately stopped.
3. The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) should make public the boundary opening report of Bugoma forest.
4. Bugoma forest should be turned into a national park so better conserve the forest and protect the environment.

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**ENDS**

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