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Press release
For immediate release
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EU Governments Must Protest Against Arrests of Uganda's Rainforest Activists

Biofuelwatch calls on the EU governments – both the European Parliament and national governments, including the UK - to protest against the arrest of peaceful activists in Uganda who have been trying to protect Uganda's last remaining rainforests from destruction.

Since Thursday, 13th April, at least 27 rainforest activists have been arrested and warrants for arrest have been issued against many more, including three Members of Parliament. The arrests followed a demonstration which ended in violence after Police opened fire on protesters. The BBC reported that at least 3 people were killed during these protests. The organisers of the protest have condemned all violence.

The Ugandan government intends to hand large areas of their country's last remaining ancient forests to private plantation companies. In March this year, they approved a controversial plan to destroy 7,100 hectares of the Mabira Central Forest Reserve and turn it into a sugar plantation. According to Uganda's National Forest Authority, the plans endanger the survival of 312 species of trees, 287 species of birds and 199 butterfly species. Mabira is also a critical water shed. Its destruction is likely to reduce the already low waters of Lake Victoria and will allow pollutants to run off into freshwater reserves, on which local communities depend.

Biofuelwatch member Almuth Ernsting says: "Plans to convert many of Uganda's last remaining rainforests into monoculture plantations threaten the livelihoods of local communities, water supplies and the survival of endangered species. We strongly support Uganda's peaceful movement to try and stop this destruction. Governments around Europe, and the EU Parliament itself, must protest against police violence, arrests of peaceful protesters and the plans to destroy the rainforests".

Contacts:

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Notes:

1. Plans to give away one third of Mabira Central Forest Reserve have been condemned by opposition parties and the National Forest Authority, as well as large numbers of environmental and civil society organizations across Uganda and abroad. A petition to save Mabira has been signed by over 10,000 people (<http://www.petitiontime.com/ViewPetition.aspx?key=savemabira>).

2. Around 1,000 people are reported to have taken part in a 'Save Mabira' demonstration on 13th April. The protest ended in violence after the police opened fire. Subsequent violence against shop-keepers was condemned by the protest organizers and the Save Mabira Crusade have blamed the Ugandan police for provoking members of the public into acts of violence:

<http://www.irn.org/programs/bujagali/index.php?id=070413mabira.html>

Widespread arrests, including arrest warrants against three MPs were reported in Uganda's press today:

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200704160076.html>

3. Deaths in Uganda forest protest

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6548107.stm>

4. To find out more about Biofuelwatch, see www.biofuelwatch.org.uk