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PRESS RELEASE

Green Belt Movement Opposes Opening of Indigenous Forests to the Shamba System

The Green Belt Movement is a grassroots organization founded by the Nobel Laureate, the late Professor Wangari Maathai 45 years ago to empower communities, particularly women, to conserve the environment and improve livelihoods.

The work of Professor Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement over the years, did not only earn her a Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 but stands as a testament to the power of women and grassroots organizing up to this day. Together, we have planted over 55 million trees that provide food, fuel and income to support households. Our activities also create employment, improve soils and watersheds, offset some carbon and contribute towards the reduction of greenhouse gases.

The Green Belt Movement advocates for the Participatory Forest Management where communities living near forests are able to participate in their forest

conservation effort while accessing forest benefits such as collecting forest products like honey and fruits. We advocate for establishment of government policies, and proper governance and controls to ensure protection of indigenous forests.

Deteriorating food security is a concern for every Kenyan. In the recent years, crop production was significantly affected by the effects of climate change such as drought, late-onset, poor temporal distribution, and cumulatively below-average rainfall, resulting in a significantly below-average harvest. While we might be able to import food, it is important to realize that we cannot import fresh air, rainfall or rivers. We must protect every milestone we have achieved so far in conserving our forests in Kenya to realize the long-term survival of our communities.

The following reasons are why the Green Belt Movement is opposed to full reintroduction of the shamba system:

1. According to the Task Force report on Forest Resource Management and Logging Activities that was appointed through Gazette Notice No. 28 dated 26 February 2018, maize growing in forest plantation is not suitable or recommended for Plantation Establishment and Livelihood Improvement Scheme (PELIS). The ban was eventually effected in January 2021 and was supported by key stakeholders. Since the ban of maize farming in forests, we have realized a significant increase in tree survival percentage. It is now easier for progress monitoring of trees planted and destruction of young trees has significantly declined.

2. As said by Prof. Wangari Maathai, the shamba system has been used to mainly establish plantations of exotic trees. Exotic trees hardly allow biodiversity to thrive. Such forests are “dead” plantations: there are no local undergrowth, birds or animals. In contrast, indigenous forests are teeming with life in the undergrowth and on the canopies, making a happy home to the living diversity of plants and animals indigenous to those forests.
3. The full reintroduction of the shamba system will encourage farmers to encroach into indigenous forests, cutting down trees, using herbicides and lighting fires in the forests. There will not be enough forest rangers to monitor all the farmers at all times to ensure that they are adhering to the set rules. Corruption, over leasing and selling of forestland will thrive. Private lorries, which collect food crops from the shamba system, may be used to collect illegal timber, poached tusks and harvested Cannabis sativa (marijuana).
4. The full reintroduction of the shamba system will impact negatively on other important sectors such as water and energy, subsequently reducing the national capacity to generate electricity for Kenya residents and industries.
"When electricity fails or is rationed, such industries close, jobs are lost, poverty intensified, crime and insecurity escalate and investors are scared away. Under such strains of poverty and insecurity economic development stagnates or retrogresses." Prof. Wangari Maathai said.

5. The other sectors that are dependent on forests is water and agriculture.

Already shortage of water in rural and residential urban areas is a reality and experts continue to warn that in a few decades, many more rivers from the deforested mountainous areas will stop flowing. Forested mountains serve as catchment areas and water towers. They are the source of wells, streams, marshes and rivers. Without rivers, enough water and rainfall, farming and agriculture will be severely affected. We need water to grow the food we eat. We also use water for many different things in our lives.

As Professor Wangari Maathai told the world “We must not tire, we must not give up, we must persist.” As we mark the 11th anniversary since she left us on 25th September 2011, we urge our government to stop opening of indigenous forests to the shamba system to protect our forests in order to improve the livelihoods of communities and foster socio-economic development of our beloved country.

Signed by



Ms. Jane Gitau

Chair, Board of Directors

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