

UNEP Press Release on Mau: Protecting Mau Forest in Kenya's Economic Interest

Contributed by naftal
Wednesday, 07 July 2004
Last Updated Friday, 03 October 2008

Nairobi, 17 July 2008-Kenya stands to lose a nature-based economic asset worth over US \$300 million alone to the tea, tourism and energy sectors if the forest of the Mau Complex continues to be degraded and destroyed, the UN Environment Programme said today.

The Prime Minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga, announced this week that the Kenyan government is taking steps to combat the destruction of the largest forest ecosystem in Kenya. The Mau Complex is not only an asset of national importance that supports key economic sectors in Rift Valley and western Kenya, including energy, tourism, agriculture and water supply, but it is also the single most important water catchment in the Rift Valley and western Kenya.

"For the past few years UNEP has been documenting for the Kenyan Government and the people of Kenya the continued destruction and erosion of this vital ecosystem. It has reached a point where if no measures are taken, Kenya will lose one of its fundamental assets," warned Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director. Earlier this week, the Prime Minister convened a multi-stakeholder forum to collect information to determine a way forward for protection of the Mau Complex. "The excisions and the widespread encroachments have led to the destruction of nearly a quarter the Mau Complex area over the last 15 years. Such an extensive and on-going destruction of a key natural asset for the country is nothing less than a national emergency," said the Kenya Prime Minister Raila Odinga. The forum highlighted the need to restore the forest of the Mau Complex. Based on the forum discussions, a high-level task force was established to address encroachments into the forests. A new enforcement structure will also be set-up to tackle rampant illegal logging and charcoal making in the Mau Complex.

"We are looking at restoring the largest 'water tower' of this country and all the services it provides to the nation. We are looking at securing the livelihood's of millions of people who depend directly and indirectly on the Mau Forests Complex," said the Prime Minister. Further resources: UNEP Mau Crisis website