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MUTULANG'ANGA BIRD SANCTUARY UNDER THREAT

Centre for Environment Justice (CEJ) is shocked that 700 endemic bird species from Zambia's 5th largest Important Bird Area (IBA) between Chirundu and Siavonga have migrated to the Zimbabwean side.

Speaking at the sanctuary, CEJ Executive Director Maggie Mwape says it would be the New Dawn Government's conservation success story should they support the restoration of the Mutulang'anga IBA.

Ms Mwape said Mutulang'anga IBA is important as it covered about 27, 000 hectares with over 700 bird species migrating globally every year.

She says the bird sanctuary was dominated by the majestic Mopane tree which has gained demand in Lusaka where some traders were buying them in raw form.

Ms Mwape said CEJ would not advocate for the removal of perpetrators from the forest but transform them into protectors of the IBA especially that they were willing to do so once empowered.

"The communities involved in clearing Mutulang'anga IBA have no alternative livelihoods forcing them to sell raw wood and charcoal for income generation," she said.

The CEJ Executive Director called for awareness of the communities to protect the bird sanctuary as some did not know their importance.

"CEJ would be willing to work with traditional leaders and other partners, hence calling for support towards water availability which was a basic human right, promote alternative energy and impart entrepreneurial skills among community members," she said.

Ms Mwape said CEJ would support efforts such as carbon trading and REDD+ to help the community benefit from their resource and restore the forest to bring back the original flora and fauna.

Speaking during the sanctuary tour, Chief Chipepo of the Tonga people of Chirundu and Siavonga said he was ready to work with President Hichilema to restore the Sanctuary as it was an Elephant Corridor with bird species of international repute.

"When I became Chief in 2003, Mutulang'anga Bird Sanctuary was a habitat of unique bird species. The natural sound the birds made was so soothing to tourists who are bird lovers," he said.

He said the bird sanctuary was protected by the Federal Government, Kaunda Government, Chiluba and Mwanawasa until hail broke loose in 2010 as it was invaded.

Chief Chipepo who is also Forum for African Traditional Leaders Chief Whip was hopeful that the birds that migrated to Zimbabwe might find it safe return to Mutulang'anga Bird Sanctuary.

"I can cite success stories such as an environmental conservation programme being implemented in Chief Lwembe's area in Nyimba, Eastern Province," he said.

The traditional leader appealed to the Ministry of Green Economy to join efforts in conserving Mutulang'anga Bird Sanctuary.

He further appealed to the corporating partners and international community to join efforts to protect the bird sanctuary.

"I pray for God's favour among leaders to find resources to restore Mutulang'anga Bird Sanctuary for the future generations benefit," Chief Chipepo said.

In an interview, Siavonga's Bendere Community Chairperson Joseph Sichopa said encroachers were ready to stop the vice once empowered.

Mr. Sichopa said no development could take place in a protected bird sanctuary as schools, clinics and water could not be provided by Government in such an environment, hence requesting for help.

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