

**IN MEMORIAM**

**MALAWI FORESTS, TREES AND ENVIRONMENT**

**Rest in Peace**

**A PETITION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
AND  
AN APPEAL TO THE CITIZENS OF MALAWI**

**By**

**The Following Concerned Organizations**

Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA), Box 5062, LIMBE  
Concern Universal (CU), Box 1535, BLANTYRE  
Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment (CURE), Box 2916, BLANTYRE  
Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA), Box 480, BLANTYRE  
Enterprise Development and Training Agency (EETA), 2683, BLANTYRE  
Greenline Movement , Box 16, MACHINGA  
Greenwigs Association, Box 1785, BLANTYRE,  
Malawi Environmental Endowment Trust (MEET), Box 3053, BLANTYRE  
Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT), Box 139, MULANJE  
The Mountain Club of Malawi, Box 240, BLANTYRE  
Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM), P/Bag 578, LIMBE  
Zomba Municipality Stakeholders Environment Committee, C/O CGF Enterprise, Box 787, ZOMBA

We, the undersigned, have noted with great concern the increasing deforestation and degradation of the mountains and hills of Malawi such as Matandwe, Masenjere Escarpment, Michiru, Soche, Ndirande, Thyolo, Bangwe, Chiradzulu, Chingale, Malosa, Sanjika Hill, Machinga, Namizimu, Zomba, Mangochi, Chilobwe, Mwanza-Neno; Mpingwe, Maravi, Thuma, Dzalanyama, Phate, Dzonzi Mvai, Dzunje, Mua Livulezi, South Karonga Escarpment, Phezi Valley, and many more. We note the increasing daylight production of illegal charcoal and harvesting of timber in the country with no deterrent action from the Government of Malawi, despite the availability of strong policy and legal instruments to address these problems.

We do not need to remind the Malawi Nation of the importance of mountains and hills being covered with forests and trees. They are the main sources of our water, sources of renewable energy, sources of fruits and vegetables, sources of household materials, sources of many essential traditional medicines to keep us alive and a potential source of government revenue in various fees, taxes and sales, if and when the forests are well managed.

Yet our forests are being destroyed at a rate that is beyond any explanation. It is probably only in Malawi where one will find nothing strange in cutting down a tree that one never planted, protected or looked after. It has to be only in Malawi where the Government fails to apprehend and bring to book people who contravene the forestry and other environmental laws.

All countries neighbouring Malawi– Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania have intact forests. What is wrong with Malawi? The loss of our forests has been blamed on poverty, high population growth, and lack of alternative energy sources. While these could be contributing factors, surely, it cannot be poverty only – because Mozambique is poor, yet they have much better forest cover than Malawi and Rwandans are very poor but they do not cut down trees irresponsibly for poverty reduction. It cannot be lack of energy sources because most of the charcoal users live in towns and cities where electricity is available albeit inaccessible to those that need it due to misguided government policy, and because charcoal and firewood are regarded as cheap energy sources because people cut down the trees for “free”; and because of frequent intermittent and unreliable electricity supply. It could be high population growth even though the district of Machakos in Kenya has both denser forest cover and higher population density than Malawi; and the Republic of China has the highest population in the world, yet they have well managed forest resources. Is it not a tragedy of comic proportions that

citizens of neighbouring countries such as Tanzania come to Malawi to exploit timber and charcoal resources?

In 1992, Malawi's forests were relatively in good state. However, when it became clear that our government had neither the resources nor sufficient political will to protect the forests, illegal felling of trees began in earnest, and few attempts have been made since then to curb the problem. Adequate management of sections of Michiru by Leopard Match Company and the Department of National Parks & Wildlife, and Thyolo Mountain Forest Reserve by Satemwa Tea Estate and several isolated community initiatives shows that mismanagement by the Department of Forestry is largely to blame. Government machinery is responsible for forest destruction, encroachment, and poaching on a scale never seen before including permitting invasion of Sanjika Palace Forest.

How can any Government watch its forestry staff light forest fires with impunity and sit back powerless? Why should staff that sell timber illegally be "punished" through transfers to another district where they can begin their activities anew? How can a Department of Forest manage its forests without Forest Management Plans? How can we tolerate the invasion and plunder of customary forests by all and sundry including profit making institutions at absolutely no cost to them? Is it not reasonable to interpret this inaction as complicity? Can a responsible government turn a blind eye to the rape and plunder of the basis of the country's wealth and the protection and guarantee of a sustainable livelihood for the country's children? How can we boast that we have a Constitution that emphasizes the protection of the environment and natural resources for present and future generations yet do everything that is inconsistent with this mandate? This is an indictment of government policy at the highest level and a calamity of tragic national proportions. With the destruction of such high profile and prominent forests as Ndirande, Soche, Thyolo, Malosa, Liwonde, Zomba and Machinga, for example, what long-term hope can there be for any of the 'protected' forests in Malawi?

Does it please the Government of Malawi to beg for financial aid for everything including for the correction of environmental wrongs that could have been avoided and controlled? We can protect the remaining forests ourselves if our Government has the will to do so. Indeed, the little efforts that Private Companies, Civil Society Organizations and individuals are doing are like a drop of water in the ocean. We recognize commendable efforts by local communities such as Sendwe in Lilongwe District who are managing the Sendwe Hill Community Forest very well. However, the positive impacts of such initiatives are being marred by the widespread deforestation in the country.

We URGENTLY call upon the Government of Malawi, through the office of His Excellency the State President of Malawi, the National Assembly and the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, Land and Natural Resources to show commitment to conservation and protection of Malawi forests by undertaking the following actions:-

- Declare a state of emergency or disaster for Malawi on “Forest and Environmental Destruction”.
- Regulate charcoal production and trade, brick-burning, curio making, lime making, and tobacco curing by charging fees and taxes on wood used for these activities.
- Ensure that Treasury allocates sufficient funds to the Department of Forestry to manage our Forest Reserves properly.
- Enable the Department of Forestry to retain the revenues they generate from our resources so they can effectively carry out their management and enforcement tasks.
- Reinstate the Forestry Board, ensure it meets regularly and fulfill its strategic leadership of the Department of Forestry as stated by the Forest Act.
- Improve the leadership and management ability of the Department of Forestry to achieve effective forest governance.
- Implement the National Forestry Programme of December 2000 which calls for the participation of private sector organizations and local communities in the management of forest resources to ensure a long-term sustainability of our natural heritage.
- Bring the full force of the law to deal with unruly and corrupt Department Staff who set fire to forests and sell timber corruptly. They should be tried and not transferred.
- The Courts should impose heavy penalties on cases of encroachment, illegal charcoal trade, poaching, as provided for in the law. No suspended sentences should be granted.
- Government should establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency to deal with enforcement of environmental laws and policies, prosecute offenders and monitor compliance.

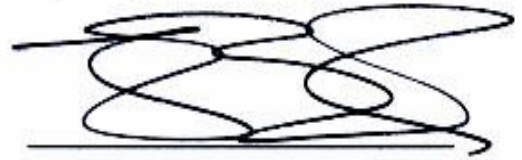
- Government should also introduce and enforce a strong family planning policy (modeled after the Republic of China and Japan) which would ultimately reduce the high population growth rate with the long-term objective of having a population that is in balance with the available natural resources.
- We further call upon the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, Land and Natural Resources to exercise its oversight functions over the operations of Government in matters of forestry and environmental management.
- For the people of Malawi, we urge and plead with each and every citizen to take personal responsibility and initiative in planting and protecting own trees on farms and around households which would supply various products including wood for charcoal and firewood.

We note that the concerns expressed in this petition are so notorious that they do not need research or investigation. They are there for all Malawians traveling on our roads, including the ‘tourists’ we are shamelessly inviting on a daily basis to witness the remains of our disappearing heritage. Yet we act as if we still have time to deal with these matters. Time is clearly against us. As the relevant laws and policies remain white elephants on our shelves, the appetite for cheap sources of energy continues to swell; we are on the brink of irreversible damage to the environment. Our country is hemorrhaging; mother Malawi is slowly bleeding to death. Can the National Assembly please wake up and fulfill its mandate. There is no nobler duty than patriotism to one’s heritage. We have no other land bequeathed to us other than Mother Malawi. Let’s protect and sustainably utilize her environment and natural resources.

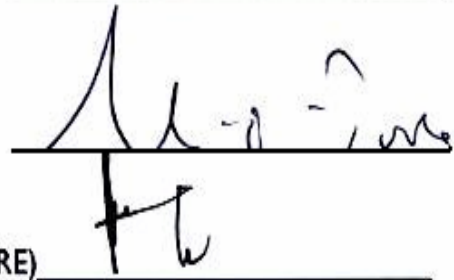
Without these actions, our descendants will curse us for our profligacy. We should gaze up at our mountains as we go about and hang our heads in shame and self-reproach for what we have done over the years to the forest cover on these mountains.

Written and signed this Day of 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2005 in Blantyre by the following concerned organizations:-

Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA)



Concern Universal (CU)



Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment (CURE)

Enterprise Development and Training Agency (EETA)



Greenline Movement



Greenwigs



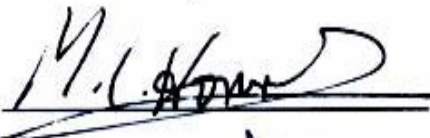
Malawi Environmental Endowment Trust (MEET)



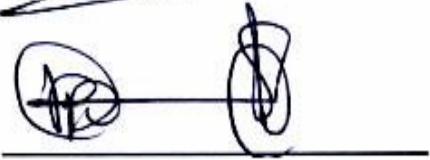
Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT)



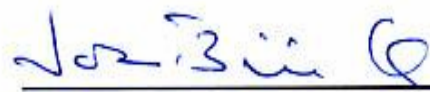
The Mountain Club of Malawi



Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM)



Zomba Municipality Stakeholders Environmental Committee



Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA)

