

Forestry activists meet to review progress

CHARLES
KWIZERA &
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LOCAL forestry conservation bodies subscribed to the Central African Regional Program for Environment (CARPE), yesterday met to assess the progress that has been made in the previous term and chart a way forward.

During the meeting which took place at the ministry of Natural Resources (MINENFRA), activists called upon the public to join the forest conservation campaign by initiating different initiatives.

While opening the meeting, the Minister of Natural Resources, Stanislas Kamanzi, commended the work done by the conservationists in the country saying that their efforts have contributed much to the country's target of safeguarding natural resources.

According to Thadée Habiyambere the head of



Thadée Habiyambere (CARPE), Stanislas Kamanzi (Ministre of Resource Naturel) and Guy Rouette (PALEF)

CARPE, the coming together of stakeholders not only serves to evaluate their per-

formance but also works to create a pool of ideas and innovations to solve emerg-

ing challenges. "This is intended to bring together all stakeholders in

the forestry conservation field to share ideas, evaluate our selves and set new

solutions," said Habiyambere.

He went on to encourage the public to start up new initiatives for the preservation and promotion of forests, saying that CARPE is ready to give them grants after assessing the viability of the initiatives.

"As the minister emphasised, we call upon other people with viable forestry initiatives to come to us and we shall fund their projects," added Habiyambere.

CARPE was established in 1975 by USAID which provides economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide with an aim of helping nine central African countries to reduce the effect of destruction of forests which was rampant in this region.

The body operates in countries that include Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and principle and Rwanda among others.

Activists call for legal assistance to the poor

BY ROBERT
MUGABE

SEVERAL African legal experts gathered in Kigali yesterday called for more legal aid to be extended to the poor especially those in rural communities.

This was announced during a conference that has attracted over two hundred participants including the legal experts, professors, human right activists and legal practitioners to discuss legal aid in Africa.

The activists called upon legal practitioners to take their services to village as stipulated in the Lilongwe Declaration which advocates for legal aid to ensure that human rights are respected.

"There is need to have legal organs, legal aid bodies and paralegal established near to the rural areas because in cities we have enough lawyers," said Karol Limonadin, the head of the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

In his opening remarks, Deputy Chief Justice, Sam Rugege said that in Rwanda, jus-

tice was being extended to the rural communities through the Abanzi (Mediators) who are charged with solving arising minor disputes in the communities across the country. He however told the activists that the judiciary was in the process of establishing legal aid offices in different parts of the country to assist in criminal administration in the rural areas.

"Rwanda is in the process of setting legal aid bureaux in all districts of the country to advise the disadvantaged who have limited access to lawyers," Rugege told the participants of the conference that took place at Hotel Novotel Monday.

Signed in 2004, the declaration which was signed in the Malawian Capital advocates for a legal aid programme providing legal assistance at all stages of the criminal process including investigation, arrest, pre-trial detention, bail hearings, trials and appeals and any other proceedings. "We are expecting a lot as we share experiences but also we expect to announce another declaration to stress on the need of these legal aid systems are just and all having access to justice," Justice Dunstain Mlambo, a South African judge told *The New Times* in a separate interview.

Minister wants EAC university fees harmonised

BY BERNA
NAMATA
IN KAMPALA

FOLLOWING the recent signing of the Inter-University bill by Partner States of the East African Community (EAC), all universities in the five-member States should charge uniform fees, the Chairperson of the EAC Council of Ministers, Monique Mukaruzi, has urged.

However the decision should only be implemented after legislation and ratification of the bill and protocol has been done by member States. "Both the Common Market protocol and the inter-university bill provides for non-discriminatory treatment for members of the community. When the Common Market is implemented and the inter-university bill ratified there will be no discrimination in all areas including University fees," said Mukaruzi

addressing a Press Briefing on Tuesday on the commencement of the Third Meeting of the second East Africa Legislative Assembly (EALA) in Kampala.

"Students from member States of the community should be treated with the same conditions. They should pay uniform fees without discrimination," she added.

In an interview with *The New Times*, Mukaruzi observed that with the principle of regional integration, priority should be given to harmonization of laws though this has been largely ignored by the community, hence making it difficult to implement adopted joint programmes and projects.

"Harmonization of laws within the community has been largely ignored in the community yet we need to have legislation in place to implement all our joint programmes. Most joint programmes are not



Mukaruzi Monique.

operational due to absence of legislation," she said, citing the provision for harmonization of fees stipulated in the inter-University bill for East Africa.

"But if the sectoral committee on education endorses the idea, we can have it implemented without ratification," the minister noted.

She added that under a

bilateral understanding between Rwanda and Kenya, Rwandan students in Kenya are paying the same fees with Kenyan nationals.

However, Mukaruzi pointed out that University Students from the Community may pay uniform fees in 2010 if the Common Market protocol is signed as it provides for harmonization of policies in all sectors including Education.

The issue of charging standard University Fees comes under the backdrop of about 7,000 Kenyan students at Uganda's Makerere University staging a strike in November over high discriminatory fees charged by the academic institution.

According to the Kenyan students studying at the University, Makerere is not implementing an agreement signed by the EAC Council of Ministers over harmonization of university fees in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania that was adopted by the Inter-University Council for East Africa.