



**Press Release Dated: 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

## **ILLEGAL LAND SALE WITHIN KOTO BALLI COMMUNITY FOREST IN MANDUAR, KOMBO CENTRAL, WEST COAST REGION**

The Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Natural Resources (MECCNAR) and the Ministry of Lands and Regional Government Affairs (MOLRGRA) are jointly issuing a warning to the general public, regarding illegal land sales and transactions within the Koto Balli Community Forest in Manduar, Kombo Central, West Coast Region.

The Koto Balli Community Forest, measuring one hundred and eighty-one hectares (181.0 ha), was gazetted as a community forest in 2020, with reference code WCR-BR 006. It still remains a gazetted community forest, as per the Forest Act, 2018. This forest serves as a sanctuary for biodiversity and also plays a crucial role in maintaining environmental balance.

Recent illegal encroachments upon the Koto Balli Community Forest threaten its integrity and violate the Forest Act, 2018, under which the area was designated as a protected community forest, as duly published in the National Gazette.

MECCNAR and MOLRGRA emphasise that any land document acquired for a parcel of land, or development activity within the Koto Balli Community Forest, is rendered null and void and illegal, respectively. All individuals and entities involved in land sales or transactions within the forest, are strictly warned to cease their activities immediately.

Preserving the Koto Balli Community Forest is crucial for present and future generations, and MECCNAR and MOLRGRA are committed to upholding the law and ensuring the protection of our natural heritage. Any attempts to exploit or degrade this invaluable resource will not be tolerated.

In addition to an ongoing internal inquiry, commissioned by the Honourable Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources, a comprehensive investigation will also be undertaken by the Gambia Police Force, to crackdown on the illegal sale of lands at the community forest. The outcome of

the investigation will guide Government of The Gambia on the actions to be taken within the next four weeks, to address the issue.

In the meantime, members of the public who bought land within the Koto Balli Community Forest, are encouraged to contact both MECCNAR and MOLRGRA.

Together, we can safeguard our forests and environment for the benefit of all, and future generations.

Signed

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rohey John Manjang', written over a dotted line.

HONOURABLE ROHEY JOHN MANJANG

**MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**