



Unilever not selling 10,000 hectares under tea in Kericho

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Anglo-Dutch multinational dismisses claims by three Kericho MPs as rumours.

√ In Summary

- UTK corporate affairs director Joseph Mitei said he had no knowledge of such plans to sell the alleged 10,000 hectares under tea.
- The three MPs said any move to sell secretly to some top government officials would be countered by all means possible.

Rift Valley

Fear has gripped South Rift leaders after word went round that giant multinational company Unilever Tea Kenya was planning to sell 10,000 hectares under tea.

Three Kericho county legislators Japheth Mutai (Bureti), Hilary Koske (Kipkelion West) and Kipsengeret Koros (Sigowet/Soin) alleged that UTK was planning to sell 10,000 hectares under tea to top government officials.

But in a rejoinder, UTK corporate affairs director Joseph Mitei said he had no knowledge of such plans to sell the alleged 10,000 hectares under tea in Kericho county.

The three MPs said any move to sell secretly to some top government officials would be countered by all means possible.

MP Mutai said the UTK land belongs to Kipsigis community in South Rift and should the multinational company intend to sell the 10,000 hectares, it should unconditionally sell it to the local community and not outsiders.

Speaking to the media, Mitei said there was no plan of selling UTK to anyone and termed the report as mere propaganda.

“The message by a section of local politicians is just propaganda and imagination from those out incite the Kipsigis community,” Mitei said.

He said no politician had visited UTK headquarters in Kericho on a fact finding mission over the matter.

Mitei said the report to sell the company's 10,000 hectares under tea to some government top officials was meant to trigger fear among county residents that the vast estates were due for sale.

On Saturday MPs Mutai, Koros and Koske had claimed that some top government officials were planning to purchase Unilever Tea Kenya in Kericho.

They spoke during a funeral service for Rachel Malel in Chebarema village in Buret constituency.

“There are rumours that the Unilever wants to close businesses in Kericho and sell its 10,000 hectares under tea to some tycoons. We are advising them not to do any businesses under the table because this land is ours,” said Kosgei.

He told the company management that they should prioritise the locals who leased the land to the multinational company.

“We will not accept any investor outside our community because we are now ready to run this land and we are calling on the company management to be transparent if, indeed, they are planning to change the ownership,” he said.

The MP added if the company will not heed the community's pleas, they will uproot the tea because the great grandfathers sacrificed the land for tea purpose.

“If they feel that we don't deserve it, they should uproot the tea and resettle evictees from Maasai Mau forest instead of a few people benefitting from it at the expense of many people suffering in IDPs camps,” the legislator said.

Mutai said that the law is clear that once the lease comes to an end, the ownership reverts to the Kipsigis community.

“Even us as a community, we have the capacity to buy this land and before making any move they should first consult the community who are the rightful owners,” said Mutai.

Koros said the reason why most members of the community are squatters is due to being evicted from the land to create room for the tea plantations.

“We will not accept any company or individuals to purchase this land and those who are now trying to use their positions to influence the ownership of the tea land will be in for a rude shock,” Koros said.

Unilever Tea Kenya Ltd, a subsidiary of Unilever, an Anglo-Dutch conglomerate, is involved in the production of tea mainly for export.

Unilever Tea Kenya Ltd, started as Brooke Bond Kenya, is one of the largest commercial enterprises in Kenya.