

Death threats received by opponent of a Jatropha project in Tana Delta

It is now apparent that private companies are using threats to silence those who are opposed to massive developments in Tana Delta in Kenya. In the last month, Mr. Hajj Idris Bakero, a religious leader in Garsen Division, received death threats, presumably for his opposition to a jatropha project in the area. On September 9th 2011, his wife Hamida Kori found a black plastic bag at the main gate to her compound, in it was petrol in a small plastic bag, four rounds of ammunition for an M16 Gun, and a warning note. Translated, the note warned the cleric not to continue "barking" about the project or else "these four bullets will get into your body, we will burn your wife and children with petrol so that your name disappears forever." This threat has now been reported to the Kenyan Police. The previous week, officials of Bedford Biofuel, a foreign investor planning to grow Jatropha plantations on local group ranches, held a meeting at Hamesa estate in Garsen Township to collect views from the public. These meetings were meant to convince the local people that there is value in Jatropha growing. It was at this meeting that Mr. Bakero raised concerns that the project might affect future generations. Bedford Biofuels, a Canadian Company was granted a licence by the government agency in Kenya to plant Jatropha on 10,000 hectares of the Delta. However, there was intense opposition to this move by Nature Kenya (BirdLife in Kenya) and other environmental organisations. It is now widely expected that the Bedford licence will be revoked and hence these frantic efforts. In the recent past, many studies have shown that growing of Jatropha has failed in a massive scale in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It has also been shown that the proliferation of Jatropha and other biofuels is contributing to food insecurity and loss of biodiversity.