Environment



A masked nurse participates in a fitness program at a Nairobi, Kenya, medical facility, May 28, 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. A Catholic hospital in Nairobi is one of the structures set for demolition after the government said it was built on illegally acquired forest land. (CNS/Reuters/Njeri Mwangi)

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St. Mary's Mission Hospital is one of the structures marked for demolition in a Kenyan government move to repossess illegally acquired Ngong forest land.

Since 2017, the hospital has been run by the Assumption Sisters of Nairobi, who won a six-year legal battle over its control. Before that, it was run by former Maryknoll Father William Fryda.

"The issue of the hospital having been built on public forest land came up about five years ago, but since the matter was in court, it could not be resolved then. I think the church and the nuns are aware of it," Fr. Joachim Omollo Ouko, an Apostle of Jesus priest who is familiar with the facility, told Catholic News Service.

On June 26, Keriako Tobiko, Kenya's secretary for the environment, said the government would repossess all land held by illegal developers inside the forest where the hospital stands.

"Except the areas that were lawfully degazetted, all other parcels of this forest whether people have titles or not, whether they have built structures for business or residential houses, will be reclaimed," said Tobiko.

Much of the forest land was illegally acquired or given as a reward to cronies during President Daniel Moi's reign. On a map, the hospital is marked as one of the structures with no legal documents.

The hospital, in southwestern Nairobi, has treated Kenyans who cannot afford to pay the services in commercial hospitals.

"There is no institution like it which serves the poor and less fortunate," said Fr. Maloba Wesonga, a former Nairobi archdiocesan spokesman.

Catholic News Service tried unsuccessfully to reach the Assumption Sisters for comment.

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