



March 24, 2023

Vice-President Kamala Harris
Office of the Vice-President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Request for Action Regarding the Human Rights Crisis Faced by the Indigenous Maasai Communities in Tanzania

Dear Madam Vice-President,

In light of your upcoming visit to Tanzania later this month, I am writing to share urgent information about the human rights crisis faced by the Maasai communities in Loliondo and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), as they are evicted from their homes and lands for safari tourism and trophy hunting.

Over the past nine years, we have worked with the Maasai communities to document the gross human rights violations committed against them by the Tanzanian government in the name of conservation and tourism revenues. Earlier this week, your office received a letter from the Maasai leaders and land defenders, detailing the shocking scale of the government's war on their lives and livelihoods.

On June 8, 2022, the Tanzanian state forcefully and against the will of the community re-demarcated 1,500 km² of ancestral land in Loliondo. During the demarcation, security forces [opened fire](#) on protesting communities, leaving dozens wounded by live ammunition and causing thousands of women and children to flee to Kenya in fear. Since last year, 70,000 people have been evicted from 14 villages within Loliondo; 10,000 people have been forced to leave homes in the NCA, while 90,000 are without access to basic services including healthcare and education. To further tighten the stranglehold on already impoverished communities, their access to water and grazing land has been restricted, resulting in the death of over half a million livestock – vital to their livelihoods. Thousands of cattle have also been seized and auctioned by the government. Community members and civil society leaders have been criminalized, [imprisoned for months](#) on false charges, and more. Given the blatant disregard of national and international laws by the government and its refusal to recognize and respect the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of the Maasai and the scale of this catastrophe, the community is forced to turn to Tanzania's donors and international partners to seek relief.

There has been [extensive condemnation](#) of the violence and forced evictions of the Maasai by numerous organizations and coalitions, including the UN agencies. On June 13, 2022, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights strongly [condemned](#) the violent evictions and urged the government to halt its plan and open an independent investigation. On June 14, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues [expressed](#) "its profound concern" over the ongoing evictions" and called "on the government of Tanzania to comply with the provisions recognized in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other relevant international human rights instruments, and ensure the right of the Maasai to participate in decision-making, considering that their land in Loliondo for safari tourism, trophy hunting and "conservation" will affect their lives and territory."

On June 15, 2022, nine United Nations Special Rapporteurs [called](#) on the Tanzanian government to “immediately halt plans for relocation of the people living in Loliondo and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and begin consultations with the Maasai Indigenous Peoples, including direct contact with the Ngorongoro Pastoral Council, to jointly define current challenges to environmental conservation and best avenues to resolve them, while maintaining a human rights-based approach to conservation.”

The Tanzanian government has ignored these calls and continued to push evictions and livelihood restrictions that directly cause widespread suffering. During your upcoming visit to Tanzania, the government will likely recycle several myths they continue to promote in state media without merit. Below, we have debunked several of these falsehoods and detailed the actual situation on the ground.

Our community partners are very much looking forward to your visit with the hope that you will use the opportunity to hold the government accountable. We echo the calls from communities who plead with you to help end the violent situation and restore land to the Indigenous Maasai peoples of Loliondo and Ngorongoro. It is imperative that the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of the Maasai communities over land use decisions is respected and that livelihood restrictions are immediately lifted.

We remain available to provide any additional information and thank you in advance for your engagement. Below I have also included several links to recent media coverage and reports for more context.

Sincerely,



Anuradha Mittal
Executive Director
The Oakland Institute

Media Coverage from January – February 2023

The Guardian, “‘It’s becoming a war zone’: Tanzania’s Maasai speak out on ‘forced’ removals.” <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jan/16/tanzania-maasai-speak-out-on-forced-removals>

Associated Press, “Tanzania squeezes Maasai by seizing livestock, report says.” <https://apnews.com/article/politics-united-states-government-animals-oakland-climate-and-environment-e60f153b513e4c9927718e2f3b9ad736>

Grist, “After violent evictions, Indigenous Maasai call human rights investigation a sham.” <https://grist.org/global-indigenous-affairs-desk/after-violent-evictions-indigenous-maasai-call-human-rights-investigation-a-sham/>

Reports

Fact Finding Report Field Research at the Resettlement Site – Msomera Village in Handeni District, Tanzania:

https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/pdfpreview/field_research_msomera_rese_ttlement_site_october_2022.pdf

Flawed Plans for Relocation of the Maasai from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area:

<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/flawed-plans-relocation-maasai-ngorongoro-conservation-area>

Maasai Community Letter – URGENT: Call for international support to stop the Tanzanian government's human rights violations against the Maasai:

<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/pdfpreview/ncaa-community-signatures.pdf>

Communication sent by eight UN Special Rapporteurs to the Tanzanian government, UNESCO, IUCN and ICOMOS in which they reiterate same concerns

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26938>

Government Claims Vs Truth

Government Claim: The rising population of the Maasai in the NCA has negatively impacted the ecological health of the area and their removal is the only solution to protect the environment.

Truth: The narrative that growing Indigenous population is responsible for supposed ecological decline within the NCA ignores the finely honed symbiotic relationship that the Maasai have developed over centuries which has allowed local ecology, domesticated livestock, and people to coexist in a resource scarce environment. This local knowledge has been largely credited as allowing the large mammal population and ecological diversity to grow under the stewardship of the Maasai. The successful coexistence of Maasai pastoralists with the wildlife within the NCA is well established: “It has been shown that pastoral land and resource use has not had any deleterious effect on the NCA ecosystem. That pastoralism is compatible with wildlife conservation is today [widely acknowledged](#). It is, therefore, obvious that there is no scientific basis for continued restriction of Maasai livestock in certain parts of the NCA, which are also crucial to their climate-driven pastoral land and resource use.”

The government has categorically failed to demonstrate that further restricting grazing and removing Indigenous pastoralists will positively impact the NCA ecosystem. The evictions and restrictions constraining tens of thousands of livelihoods are not about ensuring conservation but about expanding tourism revenues within the World Heritage Site. Tourism within the NCA has exploded in recent years with the number of annual tourists increasing from 20,000 in 1979 to 644,155 in 2018 making it one of the most intensively visited conservation areas in Africa. The MLUM plan explicitly mentions the financial stakes conceding that: “maintaining the status quo or leaving the NCA to Indigenous pastoralists the government would lose 50 percent of expected revenue by 2038.” Dr. Christopher Timbuka, Deputy Conservation Commissioner of the NCA [explicitly stated](#) that the strategy of relocating NCA residents is geared towards the realization of the government’s goal of attracting 1.2 million tourists annually to Tanzania and an income of Sh260 billion [~US\$111.5 million] by 2025 from the sector.

Government Claim: Relocation plans to move Maasai from NCA developed after consultation with pastoralist communities.

Truth: The NCA General Management plan, Multiple Land Use Management (MLUM) and Proposed Resettlement for Villages within the NCA plans were [all developed without incorporating the clearly stated priorities of Maasai NCA residents](#). During development of these land use and relocation plans, Maasai community members were sidelined and their suggestions have been continually ignored by the government. There was no free, prior, and informed consent for massive evictions from the NCA, and [over](#)

[11,000 Maasai have signed their names to a letter](#) calling on the government to stop plans for evictions and a clear list of recommendations moving forward.

Government Claim: Maasai who volunteer to leave the NCA and move to Msomera village will benefit from houses, ample land, and improved health, water and education services.

Truth: Field research conducted in April and October 2022 reveals that Msomera lacks adequate water and grazing land, while land being given to NCA migrants is already legally occupied by other pastoralists, increasing the risk of conflict over scarce resources. Despite government promises, education, health and water infrastructure have not been significantly improved. There is not enough grazing land to support cattle of migrants, which threatens the traditional livelihood practices of Maasai relocated to the area.

For more on serious issues with resettlement process and lack of resources, please see: [Broken Promises: Relocation Sites for Maasai Facing Evictions Remain Critically Flawed with Risk of Conflict Escalating](#).

Government Claim: Maasai are volunteering by the thousands to leave the NCA for the relocation site being prepared in Msomera village, Handeni district.

Truth: The Tanzanian government has cut vital services for the Maasai in the NCA in an effort to force them out of their ancestral land. In October 2022, health services were drastically reduced by the government. The Endulen Church hospital – the only hospital for nearly 60,000 pastoralists – was downgraded to a clinic. Ambulance and emergency services were discontinued and all government nurses, therapists, radiation specialists were relocated to other areas. Care for mothers and newborns and ultrasound services have also been discontinued. Only two doctors are left in Endulen.

Resources for education have also been cut. On March 31, 2022, the local government ordered that TSh195,500,000 [~US\$84,000] in COVID-19 relief funds, initially marked for public schools within the NCA, to be transferred to the Handeni district. Additionally, NGOs are reportedly less willing to fund development projects in the NCA, given the government's push for people to leave the area.

These cuts in services come on the top of an ongoing hunger crisis created by previous government decisions of heavily constraining grazing areas and banning home gardens in the NCA. The privatization of land, conservation laws, and game parks have pushed the Maasai off their traditional lands and reduced the available space for grazing cattle. Previous restrictions on cattle grazing have decimated the health of livestock within the NCA and frustrated Maasai pastoralists. Forced by these cuts, some Maasai have been left with no choice but to “volunteer” for resettlement.

For more information please see: <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/country/tanzania>