

Tanzania Conservation Ltd

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Mrs Anuradha Mittal
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Thursday, 14th September 2017

Dear Mrs Mittal,

My name is John Bearcroft and I am the General Manager of Tanzania Conservation Ltd, here in Tanzania.

Judi has kindly sent me your letter for comment that would be helpful. I like your opening paragraph “promote fair debate on critical social, economic and environmental issues”.

That one liner takes on the most difficult and challenging issues of our time. Getting it right for any project seeking to satisfy the demands of each of those three points simultaneously for the best possible outcome in a dynamic and rapidly changing local and wider world is a challenging business, where well intended constructive and properly informed research and debate is most appreciated.

We try to do our best. We may have things wrong, certainly things we could have done better with hindsight, and some things we believe we are doing right and want to get right. The same may apply to our critics and those facilitating and driving the campaign to damage our reputation. But, neither side should be above question.

To be properly informed in today’s world, to obtain adequate and true information, to be able to recognize and sufficiently question misinformation, to understand the true nature and motivation of those often complex, competing and conflicting interests, for any remotely positioned researcher reaching into these deeply political and cultural issues and locations, is no easy task.

If the process lacks integrity, so will the conclusions and outcomes. At the end of the day, the risk is that you may select what is convenient and fitting to your beliefs and opinions where facts and directly fairly verified observations are thin.

The first few points you make relate to the court case, in which the Government and Tanzania Breweries are also joined, and point to events and situations that predate both the existence of Tanzania Conservation Ltd and the purchase of the land by Tanzania Conservation Ltd but not the other joined parties. All I can say at this point is that you should reach out to the other joined parties responsible for processing the original transactions. TCL were not there in that time and must respect the court process reviewing that history and await the final outcomes. In the meantime, I have asked the TCL lawyer handling the case to comment on what he can on those points and will forward them.

However, I can assure you that if the allegations of Tanzanian Conservation Ltd and/or Thomson Safaris of engaging in torture, mercenaries, murder and mayhem, illegal occupation and operations were true, we would certainly not be tolerated in Tanzania let alone on this piece of land, nor are we above the law, nor would I be working for Tanzania Conservation or Thomson Safaris or have anything to do with them.

You will know enough about Tanzania and its history to know that they have their modern day roots in African socialism, are proud and protective of their nation, people and traditions. You should not be surprised to find that business, particularly any with foreign participation and in tourism, must behave and fit accordingly, which is why this project has a well developed contribution to social infrastructure and the local economy, more about giving than taking, and certainly not abusive in its intention or practice.

The allegations and questions regarding the role of government, police, commissioner of lands, government policy, etc, including the alleged intimidations and impacts that you mention, must be addressed directly to the proper authorities in government. It's a complicated border area with a myriad of economic, social, cultural, legal, and administrative and security challenges that you should understand for context and which make for an uncertain future for all who live and are invested there. We have no shareholders who are in any way part of, associated with or integrated with government. We are entirely independent of but subject to the will and ways of government. We cannot speak for them, nor can we accept responsibility or blame for the policies, decisions, actions and impacts of government of what you or any of us might believe is wrong.

For your last point, certain critics have certainly been opportunistic and creative in attempting to unfairly link us to all sorts of terrible things in their campaigns but the story of Trent Keegan is one of the saddest. I have much to say on this and can point to scenes and statements in the film that are so wrong and cynical it's heartbreaking. And you are right. No police from any country, New Zealand, Kenya, Tanzania, has found any reason or cause to even approach us and no judicial body has made any findings of involvement. That is because there is absolutely no truth or evidence that his death was connected to his research or Thomson Safaris as the film irresponsibly implies for effect. I am still so deeply saddened and angered by the tragedy of Trent Keegan and how it has been exploited. His death should never have happened. The event of his horrible murder and what his family has been put through is utterly awful. Why you would want to feed such pain and rumor in any of your forthcoming publications is beyond my understanding.

In short, do this properly and ethically. There is no substitute for direct, fair and balanced observation and my best advice is that you come to Tanzania, to see us, to get to know us, understand us and all sides and issues in your research.

I promise you that I will help you any way I can. I also hope that we can learn from each other face to face and that your views and experience will enrich ours and contribute to fresh and useful thinking.

We are all trying to make the world a better place.

Yours sincerely,
John Bearcroft