



PRESS STATEMENT

Key Human Rights Concerns in the Unlawful Evictions of Frontline Communities by the Uganda Wildlife Authority in Kabarole District

24th August 2016

In the early 2000s, at least 1000 families who were living in four sub-counties of: Harugongo, Hakibaale, Kabende and Kijura Town Council in Kabarole district were evicted from land they had occupied since the 1950s by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA). The affected communities are from 15 villages including: Nyakabira, Bulyambuzi, Mpinga, Igogonya, Nsorro, Kigoro–Rwabihamba, Butuku 1, Butuuku 2, Kabaswiswi, Kisagara, Kihara, Masongora, Kanyabuhuka, Kasesenge and Kyakabaseke.

The complainants had been in peaceful occupation and usage of the said land since the 1950s, only to be destabilized by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in 1998. They were advised during this period by the local leaders (Local Council 1, 3, 5, the Resident District Commissioner and the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces), to temporarily relocate and allow room for the pursuit of the ADF rebels to which, they obliged on the understanding that when the war against ADF ended, they would return to their land. To their dismay, when they tried to return to their land after the war against ADF, UWA authorities would not let them back, claiming that they had, after all, always been living within the park boundaries.

The communities allege that despite the fact that there are known boundaries including mark stones or pillars and other landmarks created by the colonial government and its boundaries including rivers or streams, rocks, trees, hills separating UWA gazetted land and land occupied for human settlement, UWA has refused them to access their gardens, many of which they destroyed and desecrated their family graves.

We, TWERWANEHO Listeners Club (TLC) a Non-Governmental Organisation based in Fort Portal, being complemented upon by the Human Rights Network – Uganda (HURINET-U), Human Rights

Enforcement Foundation (HUREF) also known as *ARTICLE 50*, and LANDNet are therefore greatly **CONCERNED** and state as follows:

1. The establishment of new park boundaries in their settlements, way beyond the visible old marks is a potential source of tensions and conflicts between the frontline communities and UWA.
2. The alleged unlawful set-ups for the purpose of arresting members of the frontline communities on allegations of illegal entry into the park; and extortion with threats of either being imprisoned or killed for alleged illegal entry; plus actual killing of some innocent individuals is a violation of people's constitutional rights including the right to property, right to life and liberty among others.
3. The alleged forceful eviction of frontline communities, imprisonment and detention as well as murder of some members of the communities are violations of the individuals' rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR).
4. The eviction of frontline communities by UWA is a violation of their rights including the right to: property, food and livelihood. It's a violation of their rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995 and both regional and international human rights instruments to which Uganda is party, most importantly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

We therefore **CALL** upon the frontline communities, UWA and other key stakeholders to take up the following:

1. That Uganda Wildlife Authority stops the continued violation of rights of the frontline communities in the above stated villages. UWA should therefore avoid forceful entries in private homes resulting in violation of the right to privacy, destruction of people's crops, houses, graves of their deceased family members and the destruction and confiscation of their properties.
2. That the Uganda Wildlife Authority and frontline communities engage in peaceful dialogue opposed to confrontation and clashes that potentially affect peaceful co-existence.

3. That courts that have been approached for justice, handle the matters in an equal and fair manner with the aim of ensuring that justice is served to meet the people's needs from an economic, social and cultural rights perspective.
4. That UWA enters negotiations with the affected members and returns their land where facts show that it is just and fair to do so.
5. That the Uganda Police carries out comprehensive investigations into alleged unlawful murders of Barisiga in 1996; Stephen Mugenyi and his brother Ategeka in 1999; and Boniface Agaba and his son Clovis Safari in 2015 and, where murders are established and fully proved, due justice through compensation to the grieved families be served and prosecution of culprits be done.
6. That those who have been arrested and detained without justifiable cause be released from cells immediately.
7. That all the frontline communities and UWA observe and follow the law in their negotiations, and that all disputes be settled peacefully as opposed to violence.
8. That the government undertakes a comprehensive geo-mapping process to establish the actual boundaries separating the national park from land meant for human settlements. This will help in reducing conflicts and tensions between the communities and UWA.

Signed by:

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