
Kenya: Ogiek's rights violated by climate change and by measures to stop it

The Mau Complex – the largest forest of Kenya – has been the ancestral home of the Ogiek Community. Although extremely important in terms of water catchment, micro-climate regulation and biological diversity, the Mau forest has been regularly cleared for settlement and private agriculture supported by official policies. Destruction of the forest has undermined Ogiek's rights to livelihood, culture and even a future.

But they still had to suffer more. Some years ago, cancellation by the government of all title deeds issued in the Mau forest aimed at the eviction of more than 100,000 Ogiek people living in the forest (see WRM Bulletins N° 94, 113) under the argument that of all people it was them who destroyed the forest.

The grabbing trend continues. A recent Survival International report (1), exposes how “the world's indigenous people, who have done the least to cause climate change and are most affected by it are now having their rights violated and land devastated in the name of attempts to stop it.”

The report denounces the case of Kenya, a country that this year has suffered severe droughts. While the government tries to evict Ogiek hunter-gatherers, who have lived sustainably in the Mau forest for hundreds of years, it appeals to the international community for funding to save the Mau forest citing climate change as “a key motivation”.

Prime Minister Raila Odinga blamed ‘rampant excess in the global and local mismanagement of our environment’ for the melting of ice caps on Mt Kenya and the destruction of forests. He also announced that they were willing to ‘reverse the ravages’ of global warming, for example, with the government's effort to save the Mau Forest –evicting its ancestral inhabitants and guardians, the Ogiek, who will be left homeless!

The report quotes Kiplangat Cheruyot, of the Ogiek People's Development Program saying: “Everyone has been living in fear for the last month... People are crying about the eviction. The government said it would spare no one.”

Eventually, the Ogiek, who have proved to live in harmony with the forest for thousands of years, who are the most affected by their forest homeland's destruction and who have not been responsible at all for climate change, will be the one who will suffer most from measures that are allegedly undertaken to stop climate change.

The case of the Ogiek in Kenya is a clear showcase of how climate change and even the measures to stop it are a matter of human rights. Along those lines the demand of Climate Justice stands out as a necessary ingredient of any true measure that deals with climate change.

(1) “The Most Inconvenient Truth of All. Climate change and indigenous people”, 2009, Survival International, <http://tiny.cc/4HL7Y>

