Kenya: The Ogiek harassed and evicted from their homeland Mau forest

Some 2.000 members of Ogiek Community in Enoosupukia region of Narok District were asked to move from the area under warning that “any person found to be inside the trust land area shall be evicted/arrested". With clashes within Kenya's fractious ruling coalition, the Lands and Housing Minister, cancelled all Title deeds issued in the Mau forest, apparently determined to evict more than 100,000 people living in the forest.

The eviction plan takes place in a complex situation. In 2001, the previous Kanu Government degazetted huge tracts of land and in its haste to allocate the land, it never bothered to degazette the forests, to legalise the allocations, giving the present National Rainbow Coalition government room to justify the evictions.

The eviction is widely seen as a scheme to discourage the Ogiek community who have been living there for centuries. The affected families have been rendered homeless and are presently camping at a local church without food and shelter.

As for the Ogiek, they stress that “there is not one Ogiek in the Kenyan parliament, which fostered and allowed and still permits that the land and the forests and the peace of the Ogiek are torn apart!”

"Tensions are high with the Ogiek situation worsening day after day given that the affected families are not even allowed access to water outside the church as torching and demolition of houses goes on" said Kimaiyo Towett, Ogiek Welfare Council National Coordinator. Local sources further indicate that the affected families who have nowhere to go are facing starvation since all their crops and personal belongings were destroyed.

The Ogiek have suffered eviction, persecution, harassment, intimidation, death threats and even murder. The elder Mr. Willa was murdered in his home at Mariashoni, shortly after the Ogiek had completed Civic Education, which culminated in "Ogiek Position in the constitutional review process". The elder is captured on video as calling on the government to protect the rights of the Ogiek people and give them back their land. That was his last statement. The Police has conducted no action or investigation. Now, the Ogiek Welfare Council fears for the life of Mr. J.K. Towett, Chairman of the OWC and co-chairman of the Ogiek Peoples National Assembly (OPNA), after receiving death threats on his cell phone from unknown persons to him. This has continued since the beginning of this year and the same situation aggravated when Towet filed a suit in Nakuru High Court against the government of Kenya to safeguard and protect the Ogiek peoples land.

The Ogiek denounce that “environmental concerns are pushed by the para-green helpers of the corporate military-industrial complex, which mainly battle for the water resources, the timber and potential land for tea or carbon-sequestration scams, blindfolding even human rights organizations in the same way as unscrupulous politicians mastermind squatters and settlers as their front soldiers, their flag -or vote- bearer and their land-grabbers. It is an outright governance induced guerilla warfare with international complacency against the Ogiek”.

“WWF, UN, private local and foreign farming ventures as well as corporate interests (e.g. of global water companies) and even the Government of Tanzania pressed the Kenyan Parliament to go for brainless general evictions of people from forests, not taking into consideration the plight of the aboriginal inhabitants, the Ogiek, who in their traditional ways have been the stewards of the Mau forest since many hundreds of years and its best conservator”, say the Ogiek.

Article based on information from: “Kenyan ministers' row over 'grabbed' forest land deepens divisions in Narc”, http://www.ogiek.org/news/news-post-05-04-2.htm, “Death Threats Against Ogiek Leader Joseph K. Towett”, http://www.ogiek.org/news/news-post-05-04-1.htm#05.04.2005, sent by Ecoterra International, E-mail: MailHub@ecoterra.net