
Kenya: the future of the Ogiek and their forests

The Ogiek people of Kenya -a minority forest-dwelling community currently composed of some 20,000 people- who have lived from time immemorial in the highland Tinet forest area of Molo in Nakuru District, have been defending their rights for decades against the arbitrariness of both colonial and post-colonial governments, which progressively pushed them to marginal areas. Only in 1991 their territorial rights were partially recognized and a portion of Tinet forest was granted to them. Nevertheless, since powerful interests wishing to occupy their lands for logging continue to threaten them, they went to court to avoid imminent eviction (see WRM Bulletin 24).

Last April 7 their appeal was determined as not urgent by the court. Therefore they are now exposed to the government's decision of evicting them. Their effort to hold on to the disappearing forest is being challenged by the state, which has allocated big parcels of former forest lands to the ruling elites, in addition to licensing logging in the Ogiek's forests.

If Kenya really wants to conserve these valuable forests and to act according to the international agreements for the protection of indigenous peoples it has signed, the government has to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of the Ogiek to their settlement as a forest dwelling community. Instead of forcing the Ogiek to live as marginalized people, suffering from insecurity in their own lands, programmes should be implemented for the resettlement of the Ogiek in their traditional territories. This would ensure a better future for the Ogiek and for their forests.