



# Maasai International Solidarity Alliance

## **Submission to the EMRIP Study on “the rights of Indigenous Peoples in conflict and post-conflict situations”**

**By MISA (Maasai International Solidarity Alliance)**

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### **1. Introduction**

The Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA) is a free coalition of Maasai community members supported by global allies. MISA works to end ongoing violations of Maasai human rights and to promote Indigenous self-determination and well-being. The Maasai are recognized as Indigenous Peoples (IP) under international law, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), due to their distinct cultural, social, and political institutions, historic occupation of ancestral lands in northern Tanzania, and enduring ties to their territories. This submission is made in direct response to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’ (EMRIP) call for inputs for its thematic study on “the rights of Indigenous Peoples in conflict and post-conflict situations,” issued pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 33/25. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this study within EMRIP’s mandate to analyze structural and ongoing forms of conflict affecting IP. Our submission draws on the lived experience of the Maasai in northern Tanzania, where land dispossession, conservation-related violence, militarization, and externally driven resource governance constitute ongoing forms of structural conflict.

Since colonial-era policies expelled the Maasai from parts of their land, land grabbing and dispossession have continued through the creation of protected areas such as national parks, game reserves, and wildlife corridors, criminalizing pastoralism and excluding communities from decision-making. The Tanzanian government has provided no compensation or remedies for lost grazing land, water, and livelihoods, and state- and conservation-backed propaganda, violence, and forced evictions persist, particularly in Ngorongoro and Loliondo. Many of the drivers of conflict affecting the Maasai originate outside Tanzania, including international tourism markets, foreign conservation funding, and carbon offset schemes driven by Global North climate policies. These dynamics reflect patterns of re-colonization, where Indigenous lands are instrumentalized to serve external economic interests. The lack of accountability for external actors perpetuates conflict and denies the Maasai access to justice.

Conflict for the Maasai is therefore inseparable from colonization, land denial, displacement, and exclusion, and continues today under the guise of conservation, tourism, and climate mitigation, leaving them trapped in ongoing injustice without peace or reparation.

## **2. Land Dispossession, Forced Evictions, and Militarization**

Ngorongoro, Loliondo, Monduli, Longido, Simanjiro, and Kiteto illustrate how militarized conservation and tourism function as modern forms of conflict against IP, restricting access to grazing, sacred sites, medicinal plants, and water, and using fines, livestock seizures, and home demolitions to force relocation.

In the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tanzanian authorities are pursuing plans to evict around 80,000 Maasai, despite their legal right to remain in the area since the 1950s. In April 2021, the President ordered a solution to what was framed as excessive population and livestock. Subsequently, the NCA Authority issued notices to demolish schools, health facilities, and village offices, and although these demolitions were not fully carried out, the government suspended essential services in health, education, and water to force relocation. Construction permits were denied, Flying Medical Doctors were grounded, ambulance and radiology services were restricted, and no national budget was allocated to NCA communities, worsening living conditions. From January 2022, a government-backed media campaign targeted Maasai livelihoods, accusing them of being immigrants and destroying the environment, and presenting eviction as the solution. The Tanzanian President also publicly labelled the Maasai as “World Heritage destructors.” In July 2024, the government temporarily barred Ngorongoro residents from voter registration and issued a notice to “delist” all villages in the NCA, affecting over 100,000 people. This triggered mass protests, including a five-day peaceful blockade of the Serengeti Road by more than 30,000 people. Despite some government promises, eviction threats continue.

Loliondo, located in northern Tanzania’s Ngorongoro District, borders Serengeti National Park and the NCA. More than 70,000 Maasai are at risk of, or have already been, evicted from their ancestral lands to make way for a tourism and conservation operation backed by the government. In 1992, the government leased the entire Loliondo district to the Otterlo Business Corporation (OBC), a UAE-based trophy hunting company linked to the Dubai royal family. To clear land for OBC, the government conducted military operations in 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2022. On 6 June 2022, the regional commissioner announced the reclassification of 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> of legally recognized Maasai land, banning all human activities and triggering widespread evictions. Police and military forces then demarcated the area as the Poloteti Game Reserve, despite temporary court orders from the East African Court of Justice. When Maasai communities protested, they were met with brutal police crackdowns beginning on 10 June 2022, forcing thousands to flee the country. Dozens were injured, including by gunshots, and two people died. One Maasai person disappeared, and many others were arrested, including local leaders. The Tanzania Wildlife Authority also seized thousands of livestock and imposed heavy fines. In August 2023, the Tanzania High Court issued orders allowing Maasai access to the disputed area pending final judgment, but the government has ignored these orders and continues seizing livestock. Legal charges are also being used to silence community members.

In Monduli, the upgrading of Essimigor Forest to a Nature Forest Reserve in 2020 has significantly restricted access to grazing land, cultural sites, traditional medicinal herbs, and building materials for the Indigenous community of Losimingori village. Similarly, the establishment of Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in Monduli, Longido, and Kiteto has triggered widespread village land dispossession under the guise of conservation. In acquiring this land, authorities have consistently ignored the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Additionally, a serious conflict is ongoing in Monduli between the Tanzanian army and the Maasai community over land designated for military training and livestock grazing. While the Maasai agreed that military activities should not exclude grazing, some

community members who chose not to relocate voluntarily have not been compensated. Recently, the army has allegedly encouraged individuals, many of them, not residents of Monduli to claim compensation, enabling the military to assert exclusive control over the land. This would result in a total ban on pastoralist grazing in the area which is the only remained area for grazing to over twelve villages.

Considering the totality of circumstances surrounding the systematic attacks against the Maasai in Tanzania, it can be stated with serious concern that the threshold for severe human rights violations has been met, including forms of “slow violence.” These actions include systematic deprivation of essential services such as healthcare, education, water, and infrastructure; the blockade of access to these services; deliberate diversion of public funds; and restrictions on private institutions providing essential support. Development projects and public services were redirected exclusively to Msomera, the location designated as the intended resettlement site for the Maasai following their forced relocation from ancestral lands. These measures, while less visible than overt militarization or eviction, constitute a well-documented form of structural violence used to coerce communities to leave their lands.

The patterns described in this section constitute serious violations of the UNDRIP. In particular, they violate the right to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security (Art. 7); the prohibition of forced removal from lands or territories (Art. 10); the protection against forced assimilation and destruction of culture (Art. 8); and the prohibition of military activities on Indigenous lands without free agreement (Art. 30). These actions further violate the Maasai’s rights to own, use, develop and control their lands, territories and resources (Arts. 25–27), the right to restitution and redress for lands taken without consent (Art. 28), the right to subsistence and traditional livelihoods (Art. 20), and the right to improvement of economic and social conditions, including health, education, water and housing (Art. 21).

### **3. Environmental and Climate-Related Drivers of Conflict**

Environmental security and climate change mitigation are increasingly invoked to justify new forms of land control over Maasai territories. Voluntary carbon credit projects and conservation-linked climate initiatives, often driven by multinational corporations and international conservation financiers from the Global North, have been introduced without FPIC. MISA conducted an in-depth investigation into emerging soil carbon credit schemes in northern Tanzania, highlighting their potential for land alienation and adverse impacts on Maasai pastoralist communities. The report critically examines two major soil carbon projects: the Longido and Monduli Rangelands Carbon Project (LMRCP) by Soils for the Future Tanzania Ltd (SftFTZ), funded by Volkswagen ClimatePartners, and the Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Project (RTEP) by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), targeting Longido, Monduli, and Simanjiro districts. MISA’s key findings show a deeply flawed FPIC process with limited community participation, exclusion of women and youth, non-transparent agreements, and widespread lack of understanding of carbon markets, contract terms, and implications. Communities are under strong pressure to sign agreements as project proponents compete to submit their schemes for international validation, raising fears of long-term land use restrictions, loss of communal grazing areas, and intra- and inter-community conflicts.

Carbon credit projects in Maasai territories, combined with financial incentives, pressure on village leaders, opaque contracts, and privatization of communal soil, threaten traditional pastoralist systems and fuel intra- and inter-community conflicts, as well as disputes between communities and government authorities. These interventions exacerbate historical patterns of land dispossession, undermine pastoral mobility – a cornerstone of Maasai culture – and reduce

food security and climate adaptation capacity. Weak regulatory frameworks, misinformation, and unclear benefit-sharing deepen power imbalances and fracture community cohesion, effectively perpetuating structural conflict under the guise of climate action.

The imposition of conservation- and climate-related projects on Maasai territories without FPIC constitutes a violation of multiple UNDRIP provisions. In particular, it breaches Articles 19 and 32(2), which require States to consult and cooperate in good faith with IP before approving projects affecting their lands or resources. Restrictions on pastoral mobility and communal grazing undermine the right to maintain traditional livelihoods and economies (Art. 20), the right to maintain spiritual and material relationships with lands and territories (Arts. 25–26), the right to own, use, develop, and control lands and resources (Art. 27), and the right to determine and develop priorities for the use of their lands and resources (Art. 32(1)). These practices also erode Indigenous environmental governance systems, contrary to the rights to self-determination and autonomy (Arts. 3 and 4), and the right to improvement of economic and social conditions, including health, education, water, and housing (Art. 21).

#### **4. Exclusion from Decision-making**

International conservation actors and multilateral processes, including those associated with UNESCO World Heritage governance and the IUCN, continue to shape land-use decisions affecting Maasai territories without their effective participation or consent. Recommendations to expand protected areas and buffer zones disregard prior forced displacement and instead reinforce conflict by legitimizing ongoing land dispossession. On numerous occasions, these actors have issued controversial reports that significantly affect Maasai lands and territories in favor of conservation, without the participation or inclusion of the affected communities. Local conservation authorities subsequently rely on these reports to make decisions over Maasai land without consultation or consent.

Conservation organizations such as the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) are implementing major land-use projects in northern Tanzania that severely restrict Maasai access to grazing land. WWF plans to expand WMAs and create wildlife corridors, while FZS advances forest reserves and buffer zones. These initiatives are usually designed and funded by donors before any meaningful consultation with Maasai communities, effectively sidelining FPIC. FZS's close ties to the Tanzanian government also allow it to influence district land-use planning, including drafting plans that would alienate Maasai land. This capture of the state by private conservation organizations is a major obstacle to Maasai rights and to meaningful participation.

Maasai women and youth are disproportionately affected by conflict, yet they are systematically excluded from consultations, negotiations, and decision-making processes. Women bear the primary burden of displacement, loss of access to water, and food insecurity, and face criminalization and repression when defending land and resource rights. Their exclusion fundamentally undermines the sustainability and legitimacy of peacebuilding efforts.

The systematic exclusion of the Maasai from decision-making over their lands violates core UNDRIP rights, including the right to self-determination (Art. 3), autonomy and self-government (Art. 4), and participation through their own representative institutions (Art. 18). The persistent failure to obtain FPIC breaches Article 19, while the marginalization of women and youth contravenes Article 22. Together, these violations undermine conflict prevention and the conditions necessary for sustainable peace.

## 5. Recommendations

This submission directly engages with the elements identified by the EMRIP for its study, including the conceptualization of conflict as encompassing structural and ongoing violence linked to colonization and land dispossession; the impact of militarization, forced displacement, and conservation-related conflicts; the role of climate and environmental security as drivers of conflict; and the central importance of Indigenous-led peacebuilding, customary governance, and the participation of Indigenous women and youth. Based on the lived experience of the Maasai, and grounded in the UNDRIP, MISA respectfully recommends that the EMRIP:

1. Recognizes conservation, climate mitigation, and land-use interventions imposed without FPIC as forms of ongoing conflict against IP (UNDRIP Arts. 10, 19, 32(2)).
2. Affirm Indigenous land rights, self-determination, and Indigenous environmental governance as foundational pillars of sustainable peacebuilding (UNDRIP Arts. 3, 4, 25, 26).
3. Call for the demilitarization of Indigenous territories and an end to the violent enforcement of conservation, climate, and tourism-related projects (UNDRIP Arts. 7, 30).
4. Promote Indigenous-led peacebuilding approaches grounded in customary law, pastoralist governance systems, and Indigenous ecological stewardship (UNDRIP Arts. 5, 18, 20, 34).
5. Ensure the central and meaningful participation of Indigenous women and youth in conflict prevention and conflict resolution (UNDRIP Arts. 18, 22).
6. Address the extraterritorial obligations and responsibilities of States and international actors whose actions contribute to conflict, land dispossession, and human rights violations affecting IP (UNDRIP Arts. 36, 41, 42).
7. Emphasize reparations, restitution of Indigenous lands, and guarantees of non-repetition as essential components of post-conflict justice (UNDRIP Arts. 28, 37, 40).
8. Encourage legal and policy reforms by States to ensure that national laws are fully compatible with Indigenous ways of life, livelihoods, and governance systems (UNDRIP Arts. 2, 26, 27, 38).
9. Promote equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms that ensure a fair balance between IP, conservation initiatives, and tourism industries (UNDRIP Arts. 20, 23, 32(1)).
10. Leverage international human rights instruments and mechanisms to apply sustained pressure on governments to provide effective remedies and redress (UNDRIP Arts. 40, 41, 42).

For the Maasai, peace is inseparable from land, dignity, and self-determination. Without these foundations, conflict merely persists under new names.

Contact: [maasaiinternationalsolidarity@gmail.com](mailto:maasaiinternationalsolidarity@gmail.com)