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Tanzania: UN experts warn of escalating violence amidst plans to forcibly evict Maasai from ancestral lands

15 June 2022

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GENEVA (15 June 2022) – UN human rights experts* have expressed grave concerns about continuous encroachment on traditional Maasai lands and housing, accompanied by a lack of transparency in, and consultation with the Maasai Indigenous Peoples, during decision making and planning. This trend most recently culminated in security forces' violence against the Maasai Indigenous Peoples who were protecting their ancestral land in the Loliondo Division of Ngorongoro District, in northern Tanzania.

"We are deeply alarmed at reports of use of live ammunition and tear gas by Tanzanian security forces on 10 June 2022, reportedly resulting in about 30 people sustaining minor to serious injuries from live bullets and the death of a police officer," the experts said.

According to information received, on 6 June, following a closed-door meeting, the Arusha Regional Commissioner announced the decision to turn 1,500 square kilometres of 4,000 square kilometres of designated village land comprising the Loliondo Game Controlled Area into a game reserve. The change would imply evictions from Ololosokwan, Oloirien, Kirtalo, and Arash villages, which could displace up to 70,000 Indigenous Maasai. The decision came despite a 2018 [injunction](#) by the East African Court of Justice and the fact that on 22 June the Court is expected to rule on an a legal challenge to the eviction of the Maasai from their land in this area.

On 7 and 8 June, around 700 members of security forces were deployed into five locations in the area, where they installed tented camps to start demarcating the 1,500 square kilometres. On 9 June the police placed markers to delineate the game reserve, but local Maasai people removed them and remained overnight to guard the site. When security forces returned at daybreak, they started firing live bullets and lobbed teargas at the Maasai.

Another situation has been unfolding in the adjacent Ngorongoro Conservation Area, where authorities have reportedly been advancing plans to evict an estimated 80,000 Maasai from their ancestral lands. Maasai representatives said that there had been no genuine efforts to

consult them and that they have learned details of the planned eviction from leaked documents. Only on 9 February the National Assembly held a special session discussing the right of the Maasai to live in the area, which has been guaranteed in law since the 1950s. The Government stated there are no plans to forcibly evict the Maasai but there have been reports of an increased police presence and harassment in Maasai villages, advising locals to “volunteer” for relocation because they would have no choice but to move.

“Under such conditions, it seems impossible to guarantee that the relocation of the Maasai from the area will not amount to forced evictions and arbitrary displacement under international law,” noted the UN experts.

“We are concerned at Tanzania’s plans to displace close to 150,000 Maasai from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and Loliondo without their free, prior and informed consent, as required under international human rights law and standards. This will cause irreparable harm, and could amount to dispossession, forced eviction and arbitrary displacement prohibited under international law”, the UN experts warned today. “It could jeopardize the Maasai’s physical and cultural survival in the name of ‘nature conservation’, safari tourism and trophy hunting, ignoring the relationship that the Maasai have traditionally had with their lands, territories and resources and their stewardship role in protecting biodiversity.”

“We call on the Tanzanian Government to immediately halt plans for relocation of the people living in Loliondo and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and begin consultations with the Maasai Indigenous Peoples, including direct contact with the Ngorongoro Pastoral Council, to jointly define current challenges to environmental conservation and best avenues to resolve them, while maintaining a human rights-based approach to conservation,” said the experts.

They also urged the Tanzanian authorities to demonstrate transparency by accepting requests for external scrutiny, including responding to country visit requests by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to

Adequate Housing and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In 2010, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area was recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for its cultural value. Recalling that UN bodies and agencies have a responsibility to uphold human rights in their work, the experts have asked the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) to reiterate to the Government of Tanzania that plans concerning the Ngorongoro Conservation area comply with relevant human rights standards. The experts recalled that in July 2021 the WHC had **recommended** that Tanzania invite a WHC Advisory Mission to consider its plans for the area.

The experts have previously raised their concerns on this issue with **the Government of Tanzania**, the UNESCO **World Heritage Committee**, **International Union for Conservation of Nature**, and **International Council on Monuments and Sites**. The experts appreciate the ongoing dialogue with these international agencies.

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The experts: Mr Balakrishnan Rajagopal, **Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing; Ms Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, **Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons**; Mr Francisco Cali Tzay, **Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples**; Mr Olivier De Schutter, **Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights**; Mr. Ian Fry, **Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change**; Ms Alexandra Xanthaki, **Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights**; Mr Michael Fakhri, **Special Rapporteur on the right to food**; Mr Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, **Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation**; Mr David R. Boyd, **Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment**.*

*Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the **Special Procedures** of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring*

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