

Open Letter to Vice President of the United States of America Kamala Harris

March 20, 2023

Dear Vice President Kamala Harris,

Please receive warm greetings from the Maasai of northern Tanzania. As you plan your visit to Tanzania later this month, we would like to share with you two major issues that are causing irreparable harm to our community. Firstly, the demarcation of a new protected area in Loliondo that is permanently taking critical land from the Maasai people to protect foreign trophy hunting, and secondly, the involuntary relocation of Maasai people from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA).

Together these two efforts will force most of the Maasai from this region to abandon their way of life. An estimated 70,000 people have been evicted from 14 villages within Loliondo and another 10,000 people have left Ngorongoro. 90,000 Maasai in Ngorongoro are without access to basic services such as healthcare. Some 600,000 livestock have been killed by drought due to restricted access to water and grazing and ten thousand others have been auctioned by the Tanzania government.

Although some government officials and some conservation organizations say that this action is necessary, most researchers agree that there is no ecological, economic or political justification for these actions. This crisis was created by government agencies and not local communities. It is well documented that the Maasai people from this region are one of the most sustainable and resilient communities in all of Africa.

We request your assistance in advocating for a sustainable and equitable solution that meets the reasonable needs of the hundreds of thousands pastoralists of the region, whose livelihoods rely on access to grazing lands and water. This letter provides background information and possible actions the US government can take to address this important issue. We respectfully request you to intervene in this matter of great concern to the indigenous Maasai peoples of Loliondo before we are all displaced and become refugees.

(1) Evicting Maasai for a New Hunting Reserve in Loliondo

There has been an ongoing struggle between indigenous Maasai people of Tanzania and the Tanzanian Government since 1992. It revolves around repeated attempts by the Government to take Maasai village land and designate it as a game reserve for trophy hunting. The Royal Family from Dubai through a lease to the Otterlo Business

Corporation has had exclusive rights to hunt in this area since 1992. Critically, the disputed land is prime grazing land during the dry season, the main source of water and salt licks for livestock, and contains many pastoralists ritual sites.

Having already given up our rightful claim to land in order to establish the Serengeti.

National Park in 1959, we reasonably expected that the government would abide by the agreement to defend our customary land use rights. On each of three occasions, in 2009, 2017 and 2022, Maasai people have been forcibly evicted from land previously.

legally accessible to them for grazing cattle and building their rudimentary homes (bomas) and civic infrastructure, such as primary schools, clinics, and dispensaries.

On May 25, 2022, the community submitted to the Prime Minister a report and request for dialogue after suggestions of new evictions from ancestral Maasai land, previously registered to pastoralist villages. On June 7, 2022, a paramilitary group of around 700 people, mostly police, park rangers, military and other Government funded armed security forces arrived at Loliondo, instigating social unrest and public panic. This operation ended with over one hundred Maasai arrested with trumped-up charges that have subsequently been dismissed by local Courts. Many others were wounded by live bullets fired against civilians by paramilitaries deployed by the Tanzania government.

Despite all attempts to stop the process, by the end of June 2022, the Tanzanian state forcefully and against the will of the community re-demarcated 1,500 km² of ancestral land, prohibiting use by Maasai people and their cattle, with harsh punishments,

including beatings, jail, and cattle seizure, for those that disobeyed. Over 400 military rangers from a special unit remain in Loliondo, confiscating cattle daily and cracking down on activists and human rights defenders.

(2) Evicting Maasai People from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area

The Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) is a multiple land use Area covering 8,392 square kilometers, with 98,000 Maasai pastoralists. Both the community of NCA and Loliondo were evicted from the Serengeti by the British colonial government in 1959. Subsequently, they were assured of continued occupation and that they would not be removed again out of the NCA which was part of their vast land in the Serengeti-Ngorongoro-Mara ecosystem.

In the past five years some government agencies and officials have suggested without evidence that the Maasai population should be moved out of Ngorongoro because of population growth. In 2022 the government began a strategy they call “voluntary” relocation. There is no scientific evidence to support these claims.

Since then, the government has undertaken many actions that impede pastoralism and most negatively impact women and youth. The Tanzanian Government has:

- 1) Stopped providing funding to support essential services like health dispensaries and schools. Suspended operation of the Makao Mapya dispensary and removed doctors from Endulen, dramatically reducing essential public health services in what was the only hospital with capacity to admit patients.
- 2) Evicted 3450 people from their homes. Closed four nursery schools, nine permanent water sources, including nine dams, and six health mobile clinics.
- 3) Provided poisoned saltlicks to Maasai pastoralists resulting in the deaths of an estimated 10,365 cows, 9,541 goats, 16,574 sheep, and 394 donkeys.
- 4) Implemented a policy resulting in the daily starvation of livestock from 28 villages.

The government levies fine equivalent to US\$ 45 for each cow. This significant penalty has led to hunger, especially for women and children, a sharp decline of the number of children attending school, significant rural to urban migration, and environmental destruction as communities turn to cut trees to feed their livestock.

- 5) Continued to support existing military efforts to intimidate political and traditional leaders from speaking out against human rights violations.
- 6) Violated the rights of Maasai indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent. We were not consulted, nor did we consent to the on-going police evictions or acquisition of our grazing lands to create a hunting reserve.
- 7) Reallocated funds previously sought and obtained to other districts as an effort to dismantle service provision in Ngorongoro.
- 8) Suspended operation of Flying Medical Service, a charitable organization which has been providing highly needed health care to communities throughout Maasailand from the 1960's to 2022 when they were grounded as part of the same effort to paralyze lifesaving services, such as vaccines in Ngorongoro District.

What You Can Do to Help

Vice President Harris, Maasai women and children are the most affected in this conflict. We know the American people to be sympathetic to global injustice and that you personally have expressed empathy and commitment to gender equity in education and other civic spaces, to respecting the rights of indigenous peoples, lifting up the voices of marginalized women and youth and taking action on behalf of the disaffected.

Given the prevailing situation we request that you encourage the Tanzanian government to:

1. Observe national and international law, especially regarding human rights that recognize our rights to own and protect our lands. The government should

respect international instruments, obligations, and good governance principles, especially to respect pastoralism as a viable way of life.

2. Immediately stop the ongoing seizure, auction, and forfeitures of Maasai livestock and to restore Maasai grazing rights.
3. Halt the plan to take further Maasai areas to expand protected areas in Tanzania that has significantly impacted the Maasai community more than the rest of over hundred tribes joined together. The government should instead provide essential services to NCA residents and immediately restore grazing rights to pastoralists in Ngorongoro and Loliondo.
4. Establish a commission or inquiry, supported by the US Government, to examine disputed lands, displaced people and to assist in the restoration of peace and compensation for rights infringements and losses by starting meaningful dialogue between the Tanzanian Government and Maasai pastoralists; and
5. Immediately cease the military special task force stationed in Loliondo that intimidates and harasses anyone advocating for basic rights and seeking justice.

We write this letter in confidence and hope that you will act swiftly to help us neutralize the violent situation and restore land to the indigenous Maasai peoples of Loliondo and Ngorongoro.