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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
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GABORONE

Ref: OPC 4/18/1 II (18)

4th October 2013

Dear Sir/Madam

The Government of Botswana is aware of, and has noted with concern a communication, dated 24 September 2013, that was circulated by a UK based organization "Survival International." The said communication calls for a blanket boycott of our tourist industry on the basis of the alleged persecution of a part of our population whom they label as "Bushmen".

We thus wish to take this opportunity to clarify to industry stakeholders, such as yourself, what we perceive to be a number of distortions contained in the said communication, as well as set the record straight about the nature of governance in our country and the role that tourism plays in the promotion of local livelihoods.

This past month the citizens of Botswana celebrated their 47th Anniversary as an independent sovereign republic with an uninterrupted record of upholding the principles of democracy, good governance and the rule of law for all citizens as enshrined in our supreme law the Constitution of the Republic. Here it may be noted that reputable international organizations have consistently ranked Botswana as among the most peaceful, tolerant and law abiding, as well as democratic countries in the world.

Further to the above, any aggrieved party in our country has the right to approach our courts whenever he or she perceives that his or her rights have been violated. This has occurred on various occasions, including a 2006 case in which our High Court ruled that the rights of 189 applicants had indeed been violated in the course of their relocation outside of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). As a nation under the law Government accepted (choosing then not to appeal) the said judgment, by fully restoring the right of the said applicants, along with their children, to unfettered access and residence rights in the Reserve. This has been and to this day remains the case.

None of the CKGR's legally recognized residents are required to produce a permit to either enter or reside in the Reserve. Permits are however provided at the entrance of the park for other visitors, the nature of which is determined by their status. Local individuals wishing to stay with their relatives inside the reserve are given one month renewable residence permits at no charge, while tourists are expected to pay a fee, as is the case with all the National Parks and Game Reserves in our country.

With respect to the positive role being played by tourism in the social upliftment as well as the general economic development of Botswana, we wish to note that it is the policy of Government to promote the direct participation of local community members in tourism through Community Based Organisations (CBOs). Such organizations are now operating throughout the country, including within the CKGR. In this respect it may be further noted that such CBOs commonly include members of the local Khoe ethnic community, also known as Basarwa in Botswana, whom Survival International chooses to label as "Bushmen". Clearly such individuals as well as the nation as a whole would be the direct victims of any tourist boycott.

We further note that contrary to the disinformation circulated by Survival International there is no longer any community in our country who survive on the basis of subsistence hunting and gathering. People of Khoe heritage also live within every district of our country. They like all citizens are part and parcel of local society and can thus be found in most vocations as well as localities.

Finally, we believe that the best way for people to learn more about our diverse cultural as well as natural heritage, including the livelihoods of our citizens, is to visit our beautiful country including the CKGR.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Jeff Ramsay

Deputy Permanent Secretary for Government Communications