

Britain's Betrayal of the Kalahari Bushmen



Until the 2002 evictions of Bushmen from their lands in central Botswana, British government spokespeople repeated Botswana assurances that the Bushmen would not be removed from their lands.

This position changed radically following the evictions: the UK government now supported Botswana's actions and denied violations had taken place. British government spokespeople, and other senior parliamentarians, made numerous statements about the issue which were uncritically supportive of the Botswana government's position. Recurring claims included:

1 *The 'relocations' were voluntary.*

THIS IS NOT TRUE.

The Court held that the Bushmen had been relocated forcibly, wrongly and without their consent.

2 *They were to 'benefit' the Bushmen by providing water, medical facilities and schooling etc.*

THIS IS NOT TRUE.

Water and medical facilities both existed inside the reserve, and children took buses to school, prior to the relocations.

3 *The overall effect has been for the betterment of the Bushmen.*

THIS IS NOT TRUE.

Conditions in the relocation camps are catastrophic for most.

4 *The Bushmen were hunting with guns inside the reserve.*

De Beers has also repeatedly made this allegation.

IT IS NOT TRUE and has been denied by wildlife guards, including Joseph Matlhare, former director of wildlife, who said in Court in June 2005 that there was no evidence that Bushmen had been hunting using guns and vehicles, or hunting too many animals.

FOLLOWING THE JUDGEMENT, ALL SUCH ASSERTIONS HAVE BEEN PROVED WRONG.

The following table compares statements by British MPs, MEPs, peers and civil servants with the findings of Botswana's High Court judges, who ruled on the Bushman case on 13th December 2006.

Table of statements by British MPs, MEPs, peers and civil servants and findings of Botswana's High Court judges.

<p>'Those who have been relocated did so by agreement with the government of Botswana.'</p> <p>Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for International Development, letter to Clare Short MP, 22nd July 2004</p>	<p>The evidence is that they [Bushmen] did not consent to the 2002 relocations. The evidence is further that in 2002, they were dispossessed of the land they occupied wrongfully and unlawfully and without their consent. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'The Basarwa [Bushmen] who have been relocated made an agreement with the government of Botswana.'</p> <p>Chris Mullin MP, Minister for Africa, letter to Bernard Jenkin MP, 19th July 2004</p>	<p>One cannot but conclude that the probabilities weigh in favour of the Applicants [Bushmen] that they did not freely consent [to relocation]. Justice Phumaphi</p>
<p>'The government of Botswana considered relocation necessary to ensure food security and socio-economic opportunities.'</p> <p>Lord Triesman, Under Secretary of State, letter to Janet Dean MP, 21st December 2006</p>	<p>The Respondent [government] says those who relocate will have access to health care services and schools; but they had those before, it is just that one had to travel to get to them. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'The government of Botswana wants to increase the standard of living for all its citizens, by providing basic services such as water, medical facilities and education.'</p> <p>Michael Davidson, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, letter to Survival supporter, 10th May 2004</p>	<p>Respondent [government] might want to pause and consider whether the disappearance of a people and their culture isn't too high a price to pay for the gain of offering those people services at a centralised location. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'As for abusing these peoples' human rights the Government paid good compensation to people for the move.'</p> <p>Malcolm Moss MP, email to Survival supporter, 23rd April 2006</p>	<p>There were, in fact, no compensation negotiations, only a one-sided decision process. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'In our opinion the government is to be commended for its investment in these facilities in such a remote area.'</p> <p>Malcolm Moss MP, email to Survival supporter, November 2006</p>	<p>It [government] might want to consider, whether... [Botswana] cannot, faced with a unique culture on the verge of extinction as it is, afford to be innovative in its development programmes. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'I take the view that it has been in the best interests of many of the Bushmen.'</p> <p>Lord St John of Bletso, House of Lords, 13th March 2006</p>	<p>The Respondent's [government's] view of development fails to take into consideration the knowledge, culture, and ideologies of the Applicants [Bushmen]. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'I believe the government of Botswana is trying to be kind.'</p> <p>Nigel Jones MP, letter to Survival, December 2003</p>	<p>The simultaneous stoppage of the supply of food rations and the issuing of [hunting licences] is tantamount to condemning the remaining residents of the [reserve] to death by starvation. Justice Phumaphi</p>
<p>'They are happier now than they were before.'</p> <p>Nigel Jones MP, letter to Survival supporter, 28th February 2004</p>	<p>Being jammed together in square plots, separated by a wire fence from one's neighbour was not one of the features of life in the settlement [i.e. before their evictions]. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'The commitment to good governance, to democracy and to supporting the economic needs of the people indeed provides a model of development on the continent of Africa.'</p> <p>Glenys Kinnock MEP, letter to President Mogae, 12th September 2002</p>	<p>This is a case that questions the meaning of 'development' and demands of the Respondent [government] to take a closer look at its definition of that notion. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'The Bushmen of the Kalahari have started herding cattle as well...'</p> <p>Baroness Tonge, article, August 2002</p>	<p>[The Bushmen] never having reared cattle in the Reserve... Justice Dow</p>
<p>'In the case of the Bushmen, I chose to call it Stone Age. A more accurate description would have been Mesolithic, middle Stone Age or hunter-gatherer. Why this perfectly acceptable, biological, evolutionary description should cause offence I do not know.'</p> <p>Baroness Tonge, letter to the Guardian, 24th March 2006</p>	<p>The case is thus, ultimately about a people demanding dignity and respect. It is a people saying in essence, 'our way of life may be different but it is worthy of respect'. Justice Dow</p>
<p>'Survival International has alleged cruelty toward the remaining Bushmen... These few people, backed by Survival International, are now holding the government of Botswana to ransom.'</p> <p>Baroness Tonge, House of Lords, 13th March 2006</p>	<p>As regards the role of Survival International... it seems to me that these organisations have given courage and support, to a people who historically were too weak, economically and politically to question decisions affecting them. Justice Dow</p>