

31 July, 2017
Ghanzi, Botswana

Your Holiness,

I hear you will be meeting my country's president, Ian Khama, and would like to explain something of the struggle of my people: the Bushmen of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, or Tc'amnpoo, as we say in my language.

More than 10 years ago, Botswana's High Court ruled that the government was wrong to ban us from hunting and evict us from our ancestral home in the name of conservation and development. One judge said that banning us from hunting was like condemning us to death.

But our government has failed to respect the ruling ever since. We still cannot live on our lands freely. The government makes it so that children must apply for permits to visit their parents when they become adults. We worry what the government will do when those parents pass away.

The government still forbids us from hunting and has introduced a shoot-on-sight policy against poachers. Last year a group of Bushmen out hunting were shot at from a police helicopter. Some of them were stripped naked and beaten.

People praise President Khama as a conservation hero when he ignores our struggle and our country's own courts. Yet his government is happy for mining to take place on our ancestral land.

We are the first people of the Kalahari. We are the ones who have protected this land and the animals that live there. Why has "conservation" brought us so much suffering?

Our ancestors are buried on this land and it has deep spiritual significance for us – it's here that we pray and communicate with them for guidance.

I will always remember when Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke out about what was happening to us and encouraged the government to think differently.

We are crying out for our land and ask you, please, speak with President Khama and urge him to listen to us and respect our rights.

On behalf of my Bushman brothers and sisters, we thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Jumanda Gakelebone
Gana Bushman and Ghanzi District Councillor