

Survival responds to Wilderness Safaris 10.11.2010

James Suzman's 2002 article, now circulated by Wilderness Safaris as a supposed 'independent paper... by a Cambridge University researcher', has no bearing on the rights or wrongs of the company's 2009 lodge on Bushman land, but is intended to discredit Survival International. Would it not have shown more respect for Wilderness Safaris' clients to have told them that Survival issued a detailed rebuttal of Suzman's paper at the time? (Before Farming: 2003/2 (14))

Survival has been careful to give references to the Wilderness point of view; but this (self-declared) 'ethical' tourist company has done the opposite, at one stage even censoring references to the controversy on its Facebook page. Could this be because it realizes Survival's position carries more weight than its own? The company has, for example, never denied that its lodge is situated on Bushman land, nor that it made no attempt to seek Bushman consent, as it was obliged to do under the UN pronouncements on indigenous peoples' rights (a fact we pointed out to the company in 2008 well before the lodge was built). Like mining and timber companies taking over tribal lands elsewhere, Wilderness Safaris hides behind national laws which violate the rights of the traditional owners.

Resurrecting James Suzman's article is an own goal for Wilderness, for he is far from being the 'independent researcher' it claims. Over ten years ago, Suzman asked Survival to fund his work (we declined); he subsequently asked the Bushman organization if he could work in the Central Kalahari Reserve (they declined); he was contracted by De Beers in the early 2000s, and went on to be offered a permanent job there (he accepted, and is now the diamond company's head of 'corporate citizenship'). Does Wilderness really think he is an 'independent researcher'?

Prior to his employment as a senior De Beers executive, Suzman had made it clear that (contrary to what De Beers was then saying) people had routinely been moved in Botswana to make way for diamond mines. Of course we knew this; we'd been told as much by General Merafhe, now vice-president of Botswana, in 2001. The following year, Suzman boldly asserted, 'De Beers had no plans to mine' in the reserve. This was an attempt to contradict our statement that the Bushman evictions

stemmed from the diamond find. Although De Beers claimed *ad nauseam* that its find was 'sub-economic', a senior executive made it pretty clear to us a few years later that it was really Survival's campaign which was slowing the mining. De Beers eventually sold the, supposedly 'subeconomic', concession to Gem Diamonds which values it at US\$3.3 billion and falsely pretends it has Bushman consent to go ahead with the mine.

Presumably Wilderness Safaris agrees with Suzman's article or it wouldn't have circulated it. This would certainly explain why it chose to ignore indigenous rights when it established its lodge on Bushman land: Suzman does not believe in them in an African context and presumably Wilderness agrees with him. Suzman says the concept of indigenous peoples' rights is 'so inappropriate to post-colonial Africa that no African country has seriously considered ratifying it.' In fact this is nonsense: almost all African states (including Botswana) voted in support of the 2007 UN declaration which unequivocally recognizes indigenous rights. One, the Central African Republic, has now also ratified the 1989 convention which Suzman is so dismissive about. In addition, Botswana's High Court recognized 'native title' (already well established on other continents) in 2006. By claiming that Africa will never recognize indigenous rights (a concept he is scathing about), Suzman aligns himself with those who simply don't want these rights recognized. Unsurprisingly, these include his paymasters at De Beers. Wilderness may support this position, the rest of the world does not.

Suzman also stated unequivocally that Botswana's actions in the central Kalahari were not illegal, thus ascribing to himself a knowledge of the law contradicted by Botswana's own High Court which, to the contrary, found government treatment of the Bushmen to be both illegal and unconstitutional.

Wilderness is mistaken in thinking Suzman's 'independent research' discredits Survival. If anything, it, and subsequent events, show how right Survival was all along.

Wilderness Safaris' 24 October 2010 statement contains numerous errors. This is the inevitable result of its decision to toe the government line. For example, it says, 'Survival International appear to have become involved in the early 2000s as (the Botswana government) withdrew services to (the reserve) residents and relocations were competed.' Leaving aside the fact that Survival actually became involved in the

1970s (and first met with Botswana officials to talk about the threatened evictions in the early 1980s), this is an extraordinary way to describe the violence of the enforced evictions, when hundreds of Bushmen were herded onto trucks and many were threatened with death if they didn't get out. The Botswana court found the removals illegal and unconstitutional, but Wilderness Safaris does not appear to: it describes the court case as merely a challenge to the 'decision to terminate services and withdraw special game licences'. In reality, the case was about the right for Bushmen to live on their ancestral land.

The 'statement' goes on to say that the company's 'first engagement' with Survival came in March 2010. This too is wrong: we wrote to the section of Wilderness which was actually awarded the tender for the lodge, Safari Adventure Company, on 12 May 2008. We pointed out then that the company had an obligation to obtain the consent of the Bushmen before proceeding. We said, 'It is conceivable that the government has offered you rights over some part ... of the (Bushman) territory(ies)... It has no business to do so, of course, because it is well aware of the boundaries of both territories... and knows that the court has confirmed the right of the Bushmen to occupy them. If this is what the government has nevertheless done, it will have violated the constitutional rights of its own citizens (again). For obvious reasons, you will want to distance yourself from any such charges.'

We went on to offer the company maps showing where the boundaries of the Bushman territories were. We received no reply.

Wilderness Safaris' 'legal advisers' now assert that the Botswana government 'have the right to decide what to do with (the reserve)', because it is state land. This too is wrong. As the court made very clear, the Bushmen can and do have traditional rights over state land which long pre-date the existence of the state. The government cannot, for a start, remove the Bushmen, at least not without breaking its own laws, again!

Repeating how 'ethical' you are is well and good, but should surely be supported by action. Wilderness Safaris claims that the company will never interfere with Bushman rights, yet it already has, by establishing a lodge, landing strip and swimming pool etc. on Bushman traditional land without bothering to ask for consent. It has effectively stolen this land off the Bushmen. The company ends by asserting that it is 'willing to work with (the Botswana government) to bring this matter to a speedy and

successful resolution.' Has it really not noticed that the government broke its own laws and even the constitution, and that the only 'resolution' it has ever been prepared to accept is its theft of Bushman land in favour of the profits it stands to make from tourism and mining?