

14/11/2019

To the U.S. Government

Dear Respected Sir, Madam,

**Re: Grant from U.S. Fisheries and Wildlife Service to Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)**

We have been informed by reliable sources that the U.S. Fisheries and Wildlife Services is funding Wildlife Conservation Society India's (WCS) attempts, alongside the Indian government, to relocate, the Adivasis (Indigenous Peoples) of Nagarhole forests. By providing this funding for "relocations" you are aiding and abetting the government and WCS's plans to evict us from our forests, which have been our home for generations.

We would like to make it clear that we will never leave our forests. For many generations, the forests of the Nagarhole range have given us everything we need. In these forests we still revere our sacred places, including the burial sites of our ancestors. These forests, which we call our motherland, have been inhabited by our forefathers for centuries, they have given us everything we need to survive, from minor forest produce such as honey, gooseberries, hair fruit, soapberries, sweet potatoes, medicinal plants and herbs, to the places where we go to worship. These forests mean everything to our community.

On top of this, we have never stopped being the custodians of the forests' water sources, such as Nagarhole, Sarathihole, Kunthuruhole, Marappana Kere, Neralekatte, Tulasi, Sana Ranjana Kola. We shouldn't forget the schools and Anganwadi centres that were built for our community. We will never leave or abandon these places, and we will never even think of relocating anywhere else. We shall never agree to leave Nagarhole and its forests, it is truly our motherland.

Our forefathers lived in the Nagarhole forests. We are both the children and kings of these forests. The government has declared 200 square kms of our motherland as a tiger sensitive zone, i.e. 200 square kilometres of Ponampete, in Periapattana taluk of this Malenad region. We will not surrender these forests or leave our motherland.

Self-governance is our birth right. Under the Indian constitution, the decisions taken by our Gram-Sabha (council of village elders) are final and binding.

Please note that many Adivasis from our forests have already been relocated. These “relocated” Adivasis have now lost all their heritage and cultural values, they have lost the traditions of our community.

Families who were “relocated” can be now seen scattered in many other places. Some now live and work as daily wage labourers in coffee plantations in Kodagu district. Other families have leased their farmlands to third parties at very low prices. A few families who leased out their land have now returned to the Nagarhole forests, our motherland, to continue our Adivasi customs, practices and traditions.

Taking all this into consideration, we would like to inform you that we will never leave our motherland in the Nagarhole forests.

Yours sincerely,

President  
Village Forest Rights Committee, on behalf two communities living in Nagarhole  
Virajpete Taluk, Kodagu (South)



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