

Maasai of Ngorongoro denied the right to vote

The Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA) is deeply concerned with recent reports indicating that the Tanzanian government has decided to exclude people from Ngorongoro from participating in the ongoing voters registration process in Tanzania. The exclusion impacts over one hundred thousand people, residing in 25 villages across 11 Wards within the Ngorongoro Division of Ngorongoro District, and mostly affects Maasai citizens. This means that these community members will be unjustly denied their fundamental right to vote and elect the leaders of their choice.

The right to vote is not merely a privilege but a fundamental democratic right enshrined in the Tanzanian Constitution and upheld by laws designed to protect it. Voting is a cornerstone of any democracy, as it helps ensure that every citizen has a voice in shaping the future of their nations. Denying this right to certain citizens undermines the principles of equality and justice that are essential to any democratic society.

We denounce this measure which we consider akin to apartheid against the Maasai community. In our view, this decision of the Tanzanian government is inseparable from the ongoing and systematic denial of basic human rights that devastates the lives and livelihoods of the Maasai community in Tanzania. The government has been targeting those living in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and has used any possible action to force people out of their land, while insisting this constitutes voluntary relocation.

We call on the Tanzanian government to take immediate action to address this gross human rights violation which we see as a targeted discriminatory attack on the Indigenous Maasai Peoples of Ngorongoro. **Their right to vote at one's home place should be upheld without any restriction, like for any other Tanzanian citizen.** It is imperative that all citizens are given the opportunity to participate in the electoral process and that any barriers to voting are swiftly and effectively removed. The integrity of any electoral system depends on the inclusivity and fairness of the voting process.

We call on the international community to publicly condemn this anti-democratic and highly discriminatory decision and request that the government of Tanzania revoke it immediately. We believe the European Union, which has been funding the strengthening of good governance and democracy in Tanzania as part of its international partnership, has a specific role to play. We also request UNESCO to speak up publicly in favour of the Maasai as this decision directly affects the people living within the Ngorongoro World Heritage Site.

We call on:

1. The Tanzanian government to stop all forms of discrimination against its Maasai citizens and to stop any form of displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their land
2. The Tanzanian government to revisit its voter registration plan and include all 25 villages in Ngorongoro Division and allow Maasai to exercise their right to vote at their home place as part of the Universal suffrage that constitutes a pillar of the Tanzanian Constitution
3. The Tanzanian government will restore all social services that have been blocked for almost 3 years now to make life in Ngorongoro unbearable and force people out, including equitable access to education, healthcare, and other essential services.
4. The International Community openly condemned this decision to deny the Maasai their right to vote at their home place and call on the Tanzanian government to stop the ongoing mistreatment and dehumanization of the Maasai community.

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The Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA)

The Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA) is an international alliance standing in solidarity with the Maasai of Northern Tanzania. We bring together international faith-based organisations, human rights organisations, international aid and development organisations, as well as grassroots organisations, individual activists, researchers and lawyers representing the Maasai in several land cases. Our alliance includes, among others, the Africa Europe Faith Justice Network (AEFJN), Agrecol Association for AgriCulture & Ecology, Coalition of European Lobbies for Eastern African Pastoralism (CELEP), CIDSE (*Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité*), International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity), Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT), FIAN International, FINAL GOVERNANCE, KOO (*Koordinierungsstelle der Österreichischen Bischofskonferenz*) (Coordinating Office of the Austrian Bishops' Conference), Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, Misereor, PINGO's Forum (Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organisations), PWC (Pastoral Women's Council), TEST (Traditional Ecosystems Survival Tanzania), UCRT (Ujamaa Community Resource Team) and Welthaus Graz. Our main objective is to put an end to the human rights violations facing the Maasai of northern Tanzania.