

**Arbitrary arrests and state violence in Endulen,
Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania**

PRESS RELEASE - 22 August 2023

This is an urgent call following escalating repression against the Maasai in Endulen/Ngorongoro. From 16 August to date, the government has deployed paramilitary groups, police and Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) rangers to conduct arbitrary arrests of Maasai in NCA. As of today, more than 30 people have been arrested and held incommunicado in unknown places without their relatives or lawyers knowing their whereabouts. It is a repetition of what happened in Loliondo in 2022. Armed groups have been abducting all men they meet, as well as people with mental issues, children, elderly and sick people including with TB.

The NCA Authority (NCAA), which is abetting the operation against Maasai in Ngorongoro, has been accused of brutally attacking and torturing NCA residents without any action being taken against them. Despite the fact that the attacks by rangers working for the NCAA against at least 16 Maasai have been reported to police, no ranger has been arrested or taken to court, not even after the recent attack on Joshua Oleparoto, a young man aged 15 whose teeth were smashed by a known NCAA ranger.

The ongoing military operation in Endulen/ Ngorongoro is extreme and is a gross violation of human rights. The government is using it to force people to leave NCA and to create a climate of fear in which people will no longer be able to demand access to the social services they are entitled to and which have been cancelled by the government since 2021.

Background

Since 2021 to date, the Government of Tanzania has frozen all social services in Ngorongoro as a strategy to make life unbearable for the Maasai living in NCA. The government, through the NCAA, denied construction permits for development and maintenance projects in different institutions and settlements. To add pepper in the wound, the government decided to defund the few existing projects. For instance, in

March 2022, the government ordered the transfer of funds that had been previously allocated to Ngorongoro for various projects, such as building classrooms, dormitories, health facilities and water projects, to Handeni District, in addition to denying access to essential social services in NCA.

Despite the community's struggle to call for resumption of the dialogue with the government and to allow continuation of the previously banned social and development projects, the government has ignored the local people's voices, their desire to be heard and their efforts to find solutions.

Community resistance and government instigation of violence

On 1 August 2023, the Maasai of Ngorongoro have been in open and peaceful demonstrations demanding the government to grant permits to renovate deteriorating structures including classrooms, dormitories, health facilities and other social services. They have been requesting authorities to allow them to access social and economic services that have been withheld by the Tanzanian Government.

In response to the community concerns, the government and NCAA used some people alleged to be journalists to entice people to relocate to Msomera or elsewhere. These "journalists" have been roaming around many places in NCA asking people to carry posters saying they are tired of continuing to live in Ngorongoro.

These "journalists" have been proclaiming that the Maasai of NCA are a backward, barbaric, poor and uneducated community that does not bury their dead but throws them to wild scavengers and therefore the only way to civilize them is to relocate them outside of NCA.

On 15 August 2023, the "journalists" also went to Endulen market with the same aim of persuading people to leave NCA. The footage filmed by the community shows the "journalists" stepped into the shoes of the government, claiming that people are free to go wherever they wish outside of NCA.

The community gathered at Endulen market seems to be provoked by the “journalists” who have been publishing embarrassing statements against them and their culture. Moreover, people who abandoned their professional ethics as journalists, whose duties are to gather and report information, to the extent of persuading people to leave their homes to go elsewhere. People resisted the “journalists” by chasing them away and some of them were allegedly injured.

As described above, this incident was then used by the government to suppress, persecute and silence people who were demanding renovation of the collapsed classrooms.

Our call

We therefore call on the government to:

1. immediately and unconditionally release all Maasai arrested and detained;
2. stop arbitrary arrest, torture and detaining Maasai of Ngorongoro;
3. end the crackdown on Maasai in Ngorongoro;
4. grant building permits and allow people to access social and health services like other Tanzanians do;
5. stop funding fake journalists to publish hatred and embarrassing statements on the Maasai of Ngorongoro;
6. prosecute unethical and unprofessional people alleged to be journalists and hold accountable all people or institutions funding them to cause unrest in Endulen;
7. put an end to food blockage and taxes;
8. Demilitarize the NCA.

Ngorongoro District Councilors