

**PRESS STATEMENT- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

**TAKE ACTION! CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS CALL FOR AN END TO LAND CONFLICTS IN UGANDA**

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**PREAMBLE**

We the undersigned Civil Society Organisations hereby in the strongest terms condemn the numerous incidents of land conflicts and grabs in the country. We specifically condemn the recent violent clashes that broke out between the communities of Apaa in Amuru and Adjumani Districts as witnessed on Wednesday 7th of June 2017. This resulted into 8 people losing their lives, over 100 others reported with serious bodily injuries while tens of thousands have been left with psychological and emotional injuries especially the youth, women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Human rights violations such as physical assault, burning of houses and destruction of food stuff were witnessed which displaced more than 7000 people forcing them to seek refuge in Apaa trading centre. It is absurd to note that the clashes between the two communities have been going on since 2012 when Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) started boundary demarcation of the East Madi Game Reserve among other initiatives.

**Historically** evidence has shown that the two communities have lived alongside each other in harmony for decades. As civil society organisations, we believe that the recent clashes are fuelling human rights abuses. It is therefore a human rights crisis that needs to be given urgent attention and addressed as a national concern by the government and other related stakeholders.

**Recognising** that this is just one case among other cases in Uganda, there is potential of more clashes likely to erupt in other parts of the country such as the Ndorobo-Benet community in Kapchorwa whose consent judgement has remained in balance, Aswa ranch in Pader/Gulu District, Dodoth and Jie communities in Kaabong, the communities in the Oil rich Albertine Graben that are hot spots of land deals and acquisitions in the country. We further recognize the increasing number and intensity of conflicts over land, especially between private investors and the local communities.

**Conscious** that human rights are inherent and that all human beings are equal and entitled to all rights and freedoms without discrimination of any kind;

**Convinced** that people living in poverty and rural women will achieve higher levels of economic independence and secure livelihoods if their rights to land are secured and assured;

**Realizing** the need for deliberate Land use laws and policies as well as their effective implementation to promote acquisition, control and utilization of land.

**However;** we recognise the good gesture and effort of government in trying to address the conflict by sending the Prime Minister although he did not reach Apaa.

We also recognise and appreciate the food aid sent to the displaced communities although the food was rejected. We recommend including community participation in future plans to avoid mistrust and suspicion.

We do recognise and appreciate the role that the media has played in bringing the issues to the limelight. We however encourage them to balance the reports and bring out critical issues affecting women and children.

## We therefore demand the following:

1. The government of Uganda should URGENTLY revisit the commitment to gazette the East Madi game reserve which has been a source of dispute and violent conflict over the years. And that they further scrutinize the procedures and processes undertaken during this gazette for equity, fairness and Justice to the parties.
2. Government Ministries, in particular the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD), the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), the National Forestry Authority (NFA), the Uganda Investment Authority (UIA) should meaningfully involve Local Governments and communities where land acquisition, boundary demarcation and land use is concerned to avoid suspicion and mistrust.
3. Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development should take lead and provide correct and accurate land information to all districts local governments (districts, Sub Counties and Parishes) to settle inter district boundary disputes and conflicts in all parts of the country to minimize conflict.
4. Religious, cultural and political leaders should pursue dialogue, peace, reconciliation and mediation as non-violent means to resolve land conflicts and disputes.
5. The existing institutions like the police and courts be strengthened to effectively deliver desired access to justice services. We specifically demand that they fully be facilitated and monitored in the execution of justice and respect of citizen's rights and freedoms.
6. We demand that the Commission of Inquiry into land matters headed by Justice Catherine Bamugemereire immediately pursue the Apaa case as an emergency, and come up with concrete recommendations to address this unique problem as well as other similar problems across the country.
7. The Free Prior Informed Consent of all community members should be operationalized to ensure inclusiveness and social acceptance before land is allocated for any activity or investment.
8. The government should suspend all boundary activities and withdraw security forces from the area to minimise further tensions and conflict.
9. Lastly that an end be brought to impunity for land conflicts in Uganda.

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