

ENOS Rahamatu Oxx

Statement to the 1st session of the Expert Mechanism on human rights situation of the Indigenous Mbororo Pastoralists of Cameroon (1st – 3rd October, 2008)

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The Chairman of the 1st Session of the Expert Mechanism,
Delegates of Indigenous Organisations,
Distinguished personalities, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Accept greetings from the Mbororo Pastoralists of Cameroon. We are once again thanking the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations for making it possible for our participation. Briefly, I will present to you the human rights situation of the Mbororo Indigenous People based on some studies carried out.

Mbororo pastoralists are indigenous people who solely depend on cattle herding for their livelihood. In response to fluctuating pasture conditions, most of them are to some extent nomadic, living in tents or mobile habitations. For this reason, they are often regarded as 'backward' and foreigners as well. In Cameroon, they number about 2 million. Like any other indigenous people around the world, the Mbororo pastoralists' traditional ways of life are based on the natural environment. Thus, any other form of activity on their pastureland poses a threat to their survival. As marginalised people, they do not have any form of representation in any decision-making structures making it difficult for their problems to be heard. Their cultural and economic survival is threatened by population pressure, environmental degradation, ecological and social unsound development policies. Modern ranching projects, natural reserves, unclear land tenure systems are major threats to their survival. Of crucial is the fact that their pasture lands do not belong to individuals but are communal or state owned land. Land is usually taken over by powerful individuals or interest groups.

Considering that the Expert Mechanism on the rights of Indigenous People focused mainly on studies and research based advice, MBOSCUA has been striving to build its capacity on human rights issues through coalition with local, national and international Human Rights Organisations. As a result, a lot studies and research has been carried out on the case of the Mbororo Pastoralists who have been persistent victims of human abuses on a daily basis such as;

- Predominant agro-pastoral conflicts where their pasturelands are often invaded by farming neighbours like the case of Mambila plateau who inhabit the borders of Cameroon with Nigeria and the Aghem people in Wum in the Northwest province of Cameroon. Pastoralists' people in these two regions have been evicted from their lands some have been killed while others moved to new sites that are not suitable for grazing. Powerful ranchers like Baba Ahmadou Danpullo in Ndawara are not exempted from these. As a result of the fact that the land tenure law in

Cameroon greatly favours the dominant farming population, the Mbororo Pastoralists are left in the hands of corrupt officials who only exploit them.

- The Mbororo traditional institutions have become business avenues where only the rich and powerful are able to consolidate power. Mbororo people no longer freely choose their leaders as stipulated by their customs and tradition, like the case of Sabga in the Northwest Province of Cameroon where a traditional leader was forcefully enthroned by Baba Danpullo in complicity with the Administration. It went to the extent of using life bullets and tear gas to disperse angry mob resulting to excessive casualties and health hazard in the community.
- In the East and Northern Provinces of Cameroon, Mbororo people are subjects of continuous kidnapping and rape. Huge ransoms are being asked in exchange of the kidnapped individuals which has totally impoverished them. This has caused thousands of Mbororo people to flee their homes to settle in cities which are usually very costly and not compatible to their lifestyles.

We would therefore like to put forward the following proposals to the Cameroonian government through the Expert Mechanism on the rights of Indigenous Peoples;

- Putting in place an institutional legislative policy framework that creates an enabling environment for graziers and farmers where both commoners are given chance to invest as well as own portion of the national lands.
- Creating grazing reserves that would permit graziers to develop and carryout modern grazing techniques.
- Stop supporting the eviction of mbororo people from their land and to cause compensation to those evicted.
- Punish perpetrators of Human Rights abuse according to established rules and regulations.
- Publish the report of the Jani Commission, which was set up by, the minister of Justice to investigate crimes inflicted on the mbororo people by the multi-millionnaire rancher Baba Ahmadou Danpullo over the years. This commission of inquiry carried out its investigations in 2003.
- Indigenous peoples should be allowed to manage their traditional institutions according to their customs.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, we know that the creation of this forum is going to make significant positive impact on the lives of Indigenous Peoples. We would therefore like to urge the Council to encourage the Resident UN Mission bodies in Cameroon to establish permanent dialogue with indigenous peoples organisations in country. Permit me end this note by thanking all who are involved in the struggle for our rights and dignity.

Thank you for your attention.