

**The Southern African Indigenous San Minorities
and the Land Question**

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by

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Ladies and Gentlemen

The most basic problem confronting us as San peoples today is the loss of access to sufficient land and resources. The San are the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa and in this rapidly developing world today, indigenous peoples are currently experiencing drastic social change and extreme poverty, stemming mainly from a loss of access to sufficient land and resources. Although the indigenous populations are not the only ones affected, but San are at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchies everywhere they are especially vulnerable to poverty, abuse, and marginalization.

Only a small proportion of Namibia's San community, which numbers approximately 2 000 people, retain management rights to their ancestral lands. The vast majority of San, though still residing on the land of their ancestors, has been dispossessed of their natural resources and now resides on their ancestral land but managed by other people. Only in Tsumkwe District in Otjozondjupa Region do the San, in this case the Jul'hoansi and the !Kung, retain partially the rights to manage their ancestral land and their natural resources. Tsumkwe District, which in the past was known as Bushmanland, is 17,540 square kilometers in size, and it is occupied by some 6,700 people, most of whom are San. As people indigenous to this region, the Jul'hoansi and !Kung have depended for generations on hunting and gathering in order to meet their subsistence and income needs.

The perception that the San are still regarded as people who roam around with no fixed location or owning any land is disturbing. There are different San communities, who conform to the different leadership styles of their traditional chiefs. It is based on the concept that the San follow a nomadic lifestyle, that only 2 out of the 6 San traditional chiefs have been recognized. Four are still pending. All the San groups want to be recognized, with the adoption of the Communal Land Bill the unrecognized San Traditional Authorities will be excluded to serve on land board committees. All groups want to serve on the land board committees, and have input on the land issue.

The resettlement process currently taking place in Namibia, where the San people are mainly being resettled, is not clearly explained, and people remain relatively ignorant about their rights and limitations under this resettlement process. Confusion also

surrounds the show of proof. Some people have documentation stating their particulars of resettlement; while others do not have any.

Without our land and resources, San communities often find themselves dependent upon farmers and others for low-wage labour, or upon the government for drought-relief labour and handouts. One solution could be that finances should be made available to the resettled San communities so that they can do something for themselves, e.g. work the land to earn an income.

In South Africa the government returned 53 000 hectares of land to the San. Some additional 25 000 hectares land in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park will be handed to the !Khomani San.

In Botswana the government cut off services (water) to “encourage” the San to move from their ancestral land to resettlement areas

In Namibia the government wants to relocate ± 20 000 refugees mostly the Angolans in the heart of the ancestral land of the !Kung.

I would like to recommend that the Permanent Forum and other UN bodies request the governments to rather assist the San with the allocation of land and natural resources then reduce it further.

I thank you