

## VIP TERMINALS FOR TOURISTS

## EVICTIIONS FOR THE MAASAI



### INTRODUCTION

At Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA), a new vision of luxury is taking shape: a VIP terminal, a five-star hotel, and a commercial complex developed by the Oman Airports Authority. But for Maasai families living on land adjacent to the airport, this expansion has meant only one thing: dispossession.

Over 20,000 residents from eight legally registered villages are being evicted from their ancestral land, which the government now claims as airport property. These are not informal settlements—these are long-established communities with schools, health centres, and water infrastructure built with state support. Their removal is not just a violation of rights, but a dismantling of lives.

## FROM NEGOTIATION TO BULLDOZERS

The Maasai community in Hai and Arumeru districts has long resisted the expansion of KIA onto their land. Initially, in the 1970s, they accepted the construction of the airport on 460 hectares. But in 1985, the government expanded the airport area to over 11,000 hectares without community consent.

Since then, residents have faced constant pressure to leave. In 2002, the government conducted an assessment for compensation but included only 429 families. When people demanded a new evaluation in 2017 to reflect the actual population of over 10,000, the government refused, insisting that those not on the original list were "invaders."



In June 2024, this slow-burning crisis exploded. The Tanzanian government signed an MoU with the Oman Airports Authority to develop luxury infrastructure at KIA. Days later, beacons were installed, boundaries were marked, and the army moved in.

## FORCED RELOCATIONS, LOST LIVELIHOODS



Evictions began in earnest in May 2024. Villagers, including the elderly and children, were told to leave immediately. Some homes were demolished by soldiers; others were destroyed by their owners to avoid violence.

"Even though we were forcibly relocated under the threat of guns and heavy security... we are still suffering because the assessment was unfair and the important social services we need are no longer available," said Gabriel Mollel, father of 15 and resident of Sanya Station village.

Mollel described how schools were demolished, health centers became inaccessible, and grazing lands vanished. "We feel isolated in our own country," he said.

For the Maasai, whose livelihoods depend on livestock and farming, relocation without land is devastating. Some sold their animals to afford new plots, only to find there was no land available for grazing.

"The compensation... didn't match the value of our assets," Mollel added. "Some received TZS 800,000 (around \$300 USD) but it wasn't enough to buy a plot of land let alone grazing or farming land."

## COERCION AND HUMILIATION

The compensation process, villagers say, was carried out under duress. Security agents escorted bank officials into the villages and forced residents to open accounts with specific banks. Those who resisted faced delays or saw their homes demolished without warning.

"We were compelled to stand in front of our houses and have our pictures taken under tight security... Then they forced us to open bank accounts," Mollel recalled. "Opening a bank account is a personal choice."



Village leaders were caught in the middle. Richard Muringe, chairman of Tindigani village, said they were used by the state to keep the peace.

"No one agreed to relocate voluntarily. The whole process was conducted quickly... You can't fight the government," he said.



Muringe said he received TZS 5.45 million—around \$2,000 USD, far less than the value of his home and sisal farm. "I believe our presence and efforts to maintain peace are what made the world believe that we relocated voluntarily," he added.



## STRIPPED OF SERVICES AND DIGNITY

The new areas where villagers have been moved to are largely undeveloped. There are no shops, no health centres, no schools. The water tank is far away.

*“We lack the essential services that drive development and well-being,” Mollé explained.*

Even children have been affected.

*“I wish I could go back to the old place. Here the school is very far,” said Lengai Kayoo, an 8-year-old primary school student.*



## A PATTERN OF DISPLACEMENT

This is not an isolated case. The forced relocation of Maasai communities from Ngorongoro and Loliondo has followed a similar pattern: dispossession justified in the name of conservation or development, without proper compensation or consultation.

On May 9, a coalition of 21 Tanzanian civil society organizations issued a public statement condemning the KIA evictions and calling for urgent humanitarian assistance and a halt to the demolitions.

“Evicting people from an area where they have already established their lives and given legitimacy to that place is an injustice,” said Mary Mushi, of the Civil and Legal Aid Organization (CiLAO). “It is clear the government is inflicting harm, oppressing them, and pushing them back into poverty.”

***“The compensation was so low that some families could not find new places to settle,” she added. “Many continue to suffer.”***

Benard Baha, of the Tanzania Land Alliance, emphasized the long-term effects on children’s education and nutrition. Without land to farm or pasture to graze livestock, many families are unable to survive.



## LEGAL ACTION AND DENIAL

Some villagers have turned to the courts. Lawyer Hamis Mayombo, from the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) in Moshi, is representing 328 Maasai from Chemka and Londugai villages.

“We are helping file cases for compensation and land ownership,” Mayombo explained. “But even those who went to court had their homes demolished under heavy security.”

Meanwhile, government officials have refused to engage with the complaints. Before his dismissal, government spokesperson Mobhare Matinyi said he was aware of the situation and promised a press conference. It never happened.

## CONCLUSION: DEVELOPMENT FOR WHOM?

The story of the KIA expansion is not one of progress—it is one of state-sponsored dispossession, where the rights of an indigenous community were trampled to make way for luxury infrastructure.

***“These are our lands and sacred spaces. When land is lost, all is lost,”*** said one Maasai elder.

The Maasai are not against development. They are demanding fairness, consultation, and respect for their rights. The forced evictions at KIA show what happens when governments prioritize investor interests over indigenous lives.

This is not just a Tanzanian issue—it is a global one. Foreign investors like Oman Airports Authority must be held accountable for the impacts of their projects. Development cannot come at the cost of human dignity.







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