

Kericho Lipton Tea estates dispute escalates

● **Walter Cheruiyot**

Kipsigis community clans have come out in the open to fight for their rights of the community's land and have vowed to pursue emotive land issue to the end relentlessly.

Led by secretary general Joel Kimetto, they told off political leaders who have failed to stand with the community that their time will come to an end but the community will remain.

Kimetto on his part wondered why elected leaders have opted to skip their functions yet the community was not consulted and questioned the criteria they used and the motive behind it.

The land in question is Lipton tea estates to Sri Lanka based Multinational Browns. The community have raised concerns claiming that the sale of tea estates in Kericho and Bomet counties was transacted without public participation and an informed consent of the local community.

During the meeting that was held at Kericho Green Stadium, they challenged Kipsigis elected leaders who included Governor Eric Mutai and Governor Hillary Barchok together with senators Aaron Cheruiyot and Hillary Sigei and all MPs who have remained silent on the subject.

In a statement read by Kimetto

stated in part: "Kericho is our home. It is not only our past. It is our children's future. The land was stolen from the local community. The land needs to be returned to community ownership".

According to the local community, the sale process breached the United Nations Guiding principles of business and human rights as well as the corporate policies of Lipton.

The community further disclosed that Lipton provided false information to the business and human rights resource centre when they claimed that local communities were given equal access.

"The Lipton Kericho tea estates are on a disputed Kipsigis land that was seized from the local community. There is an ongoing conflict between the local community and the tea estates owners regarding this land," Kimetto stated.

The secretary general further says, the community had offered to purchase the estates through cooperative societies but the offer was ignored by Lipton.

The community clans questioned the current crop of leaders who have been silent on the matter, an issue that is not clear if they have been compromised on the same or same or not because of the silence.

In a signed statement dated



Barchok

August 23 by John Rop who is the chairman and Joseph Towett, the treasurer, they vowed not to leave anything aside but to follow the law in making sure that justice is done to the people of Kipsigis.

They appealed to president William Ruto to save the situation since the local leadership has been compromised as it had failed to stand with them.

The officials disclosed that the facts have been documented by the UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs, the Kenya National Land commission and in the senate report.

The Kipsigis community clans



Mutai

that represent over 200 clans have held two meetings without their leaders attending.

Kericho governor Mutai and his Bomet counterpart Barchok have not raised the subject but are busy in their respective counties.

The statement in its conclusion claimed in parts: "Some people have talked about taking the tea estates back by force. Violence is not the answer. Justice is the answer. This land is our community land. The land leases have expired. We are more powerful than Lipton and Browns because we are armed with justice and prayers."