

Kipsigis Community Clans



P.O. Box 763 - 20200 KERICHO, KENYA

P.O. Box 315 - 40200 BOMET, KENYA

PRESS STATEMENT

Local Community proposes resolution to historic injustice for Lipton Kericho Tea Estate

- Call for Lipton to adhere to its own policy of “free, prior and informed consent”
- Call for Lipton/Browns to engage with local community
- Local community proposes resolution to historic injustice

Kericho, Kenya (14th May 2024) - The Main Committee of the Kipsigis Community Clans Organization met here today to discuss the issue of ancestral lands and the proposed sale of the Lipton Kericho tea estate to Browns Investments of Sri Lanka.

We represent the voice of the local community of Kericho and Bomet Counties as represented by the Kipsigis Community Clans Organization, 200 Kipsigis Clans, the MYOOT Kipsigis Council of Elders together with the major Kipsigis Co-operatives and Saccos (including Sinendet Tea, Imarisha Sacco, Mau Tea, Kenya Highlands Sacco) as well as the wider Kipsigis diaspora.

We understand that Lipton aims to be a force for good to help transform communities. Lipton has made clear commitments to the principles of growing “value for all.” Lipton has also made public commitments to “responsible sourcing” which includes a commitment to adhere to the principle of gaining “free, prior and informed consent” from the local community regarding the use and/or transfer of community land. We applaud these corporate commitments.

On 7th May, Lipton announced a proposed strategic partnership with Browns Investments and a plan to accelerate the transformation of the Kenyan tea industry. The announcement includes a list of 15 different initiatives in a single press release. The list is impressive, but the focus on the flurry of new fireworks in the night sky is a distraction from the flames of the legacy fire that has been burning at our feet for 100 years: the fire of human rights injustice. Between 1902 and 1963, our ancestral land was forcibly seized and leased exclusively to white settlers to form the tea estates in Kericho. These events occurred within the memory of many families in our community.

We see three problems with the current Lipton/Brown proposal:

1. The land on which the tea estates are based is community land with an unresolved dispute. A stolen cow is still a stolen cow – even if it changes owner. This needs to be addressed, not ignored.

2. Lipton has a policy of “free, prior and informed consent” for the transfer of land. This needs to be adhered to, not ignored.
3. The current offer being made to the local community is better than nothing but it remains unfair to the community given the special circumstances. 15% of shares and KSH 1 billion shillings may sound attractive – but this still means that 85% of value is going to one party: the owner of Browns. This is not “value for all.” Our local community has offered to match the price of Browns. This needs to be discussed, not ignored.

There are two paths ahead of us all.

On one path, Lipton and Browns continues to ignore the voice of the local community and ignore Lipton’s own commitments of “free, prior and informed consent.” Lipton sells the “stolen cow” to Browns - another foreign owner. Lipton and Browns will continue to repeat the mistakes of the past. The fire of human rights injustice will continue to burn. The wounds will grow bigger and bigger. The bitterness of injustice - if not tamed now - will bring further hatred and conflicts. No one would want to choose this path.

On the other path, Lipton and Browns hear our voice today and we engage to agree on a solution together – once and for all. We have a practical plan that can be easily added into your current proposal and current timetable. The needs of all parties can be addressed peacefully, and both Lipton’s and Browns will have the lasting support of the local community. A successful resolution of the historic problem in Kericho will become a milestone in Lipton’s transformation of the tea industry.

We appreciate that Lipton and Browns would like to move quickly – so do we. We extend an open invitation to meet representatives of Lipton and Browns and politely request a response within 7 days.



Signatories listed on attached page.

For and on behalf of the Kipsigis Community Clans Organization

John K. Rop
Chairman

Joel K. Kimetto
Secretary General

Joseph K. Towett
Treasurer

Sigira A. Koech
Assistant Secretary

James K. Biy
Assistant Treasurer

David Tuei
Member / Researcher

Michael Kirui Sotonik
Member

John K. Koech
Member

Rev. Joel Langat
Member

Richard Chumo
Member

Samwel Langat
Member

David C. Mitei
Member

Pastor Paul Misik
Member & Pastor

Peter K. Bett
Member

Pastor Jennifer Nyigei
Member & Pastor

John K.A. Sigei
Member

Joseph C. Bii
Member

Thomas K. Cherutany
Member

David Kipkoech Chepkwony
Member

Snr Rtd Chief John Koske
Member

Peter K. Bett
Member

Joel K. Koske
Member

Daniel Soy
Member

Joseph K. Rotich
Member

Moses Kipruto Mutai
Member

14th May 2024