

EKURI TRADITIONAL RULERS COUNCIL

Ekuri Community,
Akamkpa L.G.A.,
Cross River State,
Nigeria.
E-mail: ekuri1@yahoo.com

7th February, 2016.

His Excellency,
Governor of Cross River State,
Governor's Office,
Calabar.

Your Excellency Sir,

RE: NOTICE OF REVOCATION OF RIGHTS OF OCCUPANCY FOR PUBLIC PURPOSE LAND USE ACT 1978: OUR POSITION

We the undersigned Chiefs, Elders, Women Leaders and Youth Leaders for and on behalf of Old Ekuri and New Ekuri villages, otherwise called Ekuri community (situated in the tropical forest) in Akamkpa Local Government Area in Cross River State of Nigeria were elated when you announced your signature projects on May 29, 2014 during your swearing-in. We had high hopes that your new administration will turn around the fortunes of Cross River State and Nigeria at large because of the signature projects. Late last year, when we learnt that the proposed Super Highway was to pass through our Ekuri community forest, we were full of joy as this road, would have helped to address centuries old problems of poverty due to poor road, high costs of transportation, ridiculous prices for our farm/forest products. We were carried away by your good gesture and goodwill and decided to support the Super Highway without consulting our ancestral deities on the likely implications of this road.

However, our attention has been drawn to a publication in Weekend Chronicle of January 22, 2016 signed and dated 13th January, 2016 by Elder (Dr.) John Inyang, Commissioner for Lands and Urban Development on the above subject matter. The Public Notice of Revocation stated that "all rights of occupancy existing or deemed to exist on all that piece of land or parcel of land lying and situate along the Super Highway from Esighi, Bakassi Local Government Area to Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State of Nigeria covering a distance of 260km approximately and having an offset of two hundred meters (200m) on either side of the centre line of the road and further 10km after the span of the Super Highway, excluding Government Forest Reserves and public institutions are hereby revoked for overriding public purpose absolutely". We have studied the published Notice of

the Revocation including the line profile and found out that some of the coordinates as published are in Ekuri community forest.

This Notice of Revocation has alarmed us greatly. Your good gesture has turned sour and bitter in our mouths, and even the vulnerable and defenceless rivers and streams and every living plant and creature in our forests are complaining bitterly for the following reasons:

a. The exclusion of Government Forest Reserves and public institutions as published in the revocation's notice without "*settlements*" being also excluded means that we will become strangers on our ancestral land and likely to be evicted anytime to become squatters in unknown lands. This will lead to loss of our culture against UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

b. The right of way for the Super Highway measuring 400 meters wide (200m on each side of the road from the center line), being the width of four standard football fields, is too large and will destroy our forest and farms that we have laboured to conserve and cultivate crops. This is considering the fact that there will be no adequate compensation because the Land Use Decree of 1978 does not recognize customary rights.

c. The further 10km on either side of the Super Highway from where the 200 meters ends totalling 20km width is appalling, meaning that the whole of our Ekuri community forest totalling 33,600 hectares, all our farms and community settlements would have been revoked leaving us landless against our Fundamental Human Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Article 169.

d. We have for centuries conserved and managed our Ekuri community forest for its rich biodiversity and ecosystems services not only for our sustainable development but for the entire world. Since 1992, we pioneered formal community forestry in Nigeria and established the Ekuri Initiative (an NGO registered with the Federal Government) with a mandate in forest conservation, sustainable forest management, community development and poverty reduction. Since its inception, we have recorded inspiring successes. We have developed and implemented a land use plan which we jealously adhere to, a flagship community forestry project in Nigeria (a credit to Cross River State), the largest and best communally managed forest in West Africa totalling 33,600ha. We received the UNDP Equator Award in 2004 for our outstanding passion, commitments and efforts to reducing poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of our biodiversity. We have been visited by several communities from Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique and a host of researchers to learn from our experiences. Our activities have been replicated by international development agencies and local NGOs and

has brought fame to Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole. The planned destruction of our community forests which we have laboured so hard to protect and conserve is not a welcome development. *The resolve of our forebears to conserve our forest must be continued in perpetuity being a bequest and legacy to all the Ekuri people living and yet unborn.*

e. The Ekuri community forest stores several million tons of carbon contributing substantially to climate change mitigation at the local, national and global level. The destruction of this forest due to the planned revocation and the resultant forest destruction will release a huge quantum of carbon into the atmosphere and will aggravate climate change with attendant negative effects on humanity in general. This is against the Governor's Climate & Forest Task Force (GCF) focus and program of: "Working to protect tropical forests, reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and promote realistic pathways to forest-maintaining rural development". As the representative of Cross River State which is the only African member in the Governor's Climate and Forests Task Force (GCF), we expect that your role should be to strengthen our conservation efforts and those of other forest communities in the state to achieve the foregoing and not otherwise. Also, this revocation is against the focus and programs of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) whose Conference you participated on December, 2015 in Paris, France and even the UN-REDD+ program for which Cross River State is the pilot state to set an example for the rest of Nigeria.

f. Our forest is our wealth and the beacon of our hopes and aspirations. It provides us food, meat and fish for our protein, herbs for our wellbeing, poles, cane ropes and wood for building our houses, fuelwood for our energy, incomes for our daily living and building of facilities; it sustains our culture and spirituality, a fall back in times of need and recreation and provides habitats for the animals, birds, reptiles, insects with whom we share common affinity. Thus, taking away our forest and the benefits there-from, is likened to taking a fish out of water onto land to die painfully and this is what the revocation means for us.


g. The goodwill, funding and supports of the Federal and Cross River State Governments, international development agencies Like DFID, USAID etc., foundations, donors, corporate entities and individuals for the conservation and sustainable management of our forest for the benefits of humanity, cannot be obliterated in a twinkle. The Super Highway should have strengthened such commitments and efforts and should not aim to destroy our forest considering the huge resources spent over the years to keep it intact for the wellbeing of all in Cross River State including your Excellency. We are happy that you are an environmentalist and thus you must understand what we are talking about. We strongly believe that the decision to revoke our rights to our forest and to exile us will have dire consequences on Cross River State's reputation in terms

of credibility with national and international NGOs and international development agencies worldwide.

In the light of the above, we consider the revocation a pogrom against us as published and a land grab in the guise of a Super Highway. Therefore, we have no option but withdraw our support for the Super Highway and do not want the Super Highway to pass through our Ekuri community forest. Our ancestral deities in the forest are crying against this injustice of highest magnitude in our history and their cries will never stop and we cannot disobey them knowing the likely implications on us. We request that the Superhighway route should be changed to run to the immediate north of our community lands rather than going through the middle of our forests as currently planned.

Thank you and best regards Sir.

Your faithfully,


AtaObuol Samuel Olory
(Clan Head)


AtaObuol Stephen Oji
(Village Head - Old Ekuri)


Obuol Henry Olory
(Village Head - Aforamar)



Obuol Richard Egbe
(Village Head - Alogo)


Obuol Boniface Oyi
(Village Head - Ibom)


Obuol John Oyi
(Village Head - Adiabor)



Obuol Kenneth Njah
(Village Head - Oforoko)



AtaObuol Abel Egbe
(Village Head - New Ekuri)


Obuol Edwin Ogar
(Village Head - Ubiofor)


Obuol Godfrey Otio
(Village Head - Atakam)


Obuol John Egeh
(Village Head - Orontimmi)


Obuol Raphael Akamo
(Village Head - Agamlogon)


Obuol Linus Arikpo
(Village Head - Obio Mkparawa)


ObuoAnel Lawrencia Agbor
(Woman Leader - New Ekuri)



Obuol Dennis Oyamo
(Village Head - Irien)



Obuol Anel Grace Cletus
(Woman Leader - Old Ekuri)



Mr. Martins Egot
(Chair - Ekuri Initiative)



Obuol Arimbuoh Benard Ogar
(Youth Leader - New Ekuri)



Obuol Arimbuoh Innocent Oyamo
(Youth Leader - Old Ekuri)



Mr. Michael Olory
(Coordinator - Ekuri Initiative)

Cc.

The President of the Republic of Nigeria.

Minister for Environment of Nigeria

1. UNEP
2. UNDP
3. FAO
4. World Bank
5. Heinrich Boell Foundation
6. WWF
7. WCS
8. NCF
9. ERA (FoEN)
10. NGOCE
11. Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
12. Cross River National Park
13. Birdlife International
14. CIDA
15. DFID
16. GCF
17. USAID
18. NORFUND
19. SIDA
20. CCDI
21. Equator Initiative
22. Rights and Resource Initiative (RRI)
23. UNESCO
24. Ford Foundation
25. OneSky Canada
26. CBD
27. RARE
28. Conservation International
29. Rainforest Action Network
30. Earthisland Institute
31. UNCHR
32. IUCN
33. Media