DECLARATION BY THE TRADITIONAL LEADERS OF KAOKOLAND IN NAMIBIA

Opwo, 20 January 2012

We, the indigenous Himba people, are the original inhabitants, caretakers and true owners of our Kaokoland that we have inherited from our ancestors.

We know through our oral history and knowledge that our traditional territory stretches from the Kunene river in the north, to the Damaraland in the south, to the Atlantic ocean in the west, and to the Ovazemba and Owamboland in the east.

The borders of our territory were always clearly defined through mutual respect between us and the neighboring tribes.

Those borders were reaffirmed as well as documented by all three colonial governments that ruled our country before Namibia became independent.

On every map or schoolbooks about Namibia one can see our Kaokoland's borders being acknowledged.

Within Kaokoland we traditional leaders rule and care for our people and land in our areas according to our ancestral governance structure.

But to our great grievance, the Namibian government has destroyed our ancestral traditional governance structure, by disposing and withholding the official recognition of 33 of us as rightful traditional leaders.

We and other traditional leaders from other tribes went to the High Court, and we won the case on December 13th 2001, and the Government of Namibia was ordered to re-install us in our rightful positions as Traditional Authorities.

But the state did not comply to the Court order to this very day, and we remain the not recognized leaders, removed from our legal powers.

Today we have only 3 traditional chiefs that are recognized by the state, that share overlapping jurisdiction of the entire Kaokoland.

Our people and we strongly object to the states' ruthless interference by the Government of Namibia that is disabling our people to choose their own leaders and destiny.

We therefore declare that the Government of Namibia deliberately disempowering us to govern ourselves within our Kaokoland to hinder us and our people to determine our own future, such as to ensure the continuity of our cultural identity, traditions and customs and our political institution, that we wish to preserve for the future generations.

Because we are no longer allowed to govern, and are not recognized by the Government of Namibia as the legitimate leaders of our people and land, we see our traditional territory being invaded by the ruling Ovambo ethnic group
in Namibia, that controls the ruling SWAPO Party which in turn runs the government.

The ruling SWAPO Party has been imposing on us laws, programs, leaders and projects that we don’t want, but we are made voiceless. We are not consulted, not included in any decision-making processes, nor are we heard when we object.

We are therefore the marginalized and oppressed tribe in our country Namibia.

We are currently facing a law that allows any citizen of Namibia to apply and receive 20 hectares of our land. (Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002). We strongly object this law that is forced upon our throats against our will and consent.

This is a land grab! We are loosing our land. Our land is being fenced by outsiders that are not from our area.

We, the original people of this Kaokoland are semi nomadic people. We are roaming with our cattle, goat and sheep from place to place. We react to the change of climate in our semi dessert environment, and follow the needs of our livestock and move them to grazing areas that are sufficient for them, especially during dry season.

We experience already climate change. The weather is becoming more extreme. It is growingly hotter and we have less rain. When it rains we have severe floods. Our land is facing desertification, which means less green food for our animals and less crop production for our people.

The fencing of our land is therefore not only a land right issue, and threatening our way of live, but more so a matter of our very survival.

We won’t be able to adopt and mitigate the negative effects of climate change when we are no longer able to access and roam freely our land.

We also complain that the Government of Namibia has not taken any steps to inform us on climate change, nor has it taken steps to help us with mitigating and adapting to those changes.

We also face other forms of invasion into our territory by large-scale mining companies, which will destroy huge areas of our environment without our free, prior and informed consent.

We are not even informed what resources are taken out of our grounds, what dangerous chemicals are used in the process, nor do we receive any benefits from our stolen natural resources.

But if our own people want to apply for a small-scale mining permits, we usually cannot obtain them, and we are told that area already belongs to other companies often owned by non-Himba outsiders.

The Government of Namibia is giving away our other natural resources, such as fish from our marine territory to the west, where the Government is giving away large-scale fishing rights to multinational companies.
In the recent past we have successfully opposed the construction of the Epupa Hydroelectric Dam. Our leaders, such as Chief Hikumune Kapika and Chief Paulus Tjavara and others went to the UN and informed the Human Rights Committee and then UN Human Rights High Commissioner Mary Robinson herself about the injustice done to us. As a result, the World Bank removed its financial support for the Dam, as has Japan and other international financiers]. Today the Government of Namibia claims that they have listened to us, but in reality they have been forced by the international pressure to cease the construction of the dam.

Today, we now also hear that the Government of Namibia wants to build again a dam in our territory, this time at Baynes Mountains, downstream of Epupa area]. But as we have done so in the past, we strongly oppose and object to this. Again, the affected communities and traditional leaders have not been consulted, nor have we been included in any steps of the planning and decision-making levels. We will never give our consent to have our river being blocked, the life in the waters and dependent of it being threatened, and to have our environment being destroyed and our land being taken away from us.

We would lose our graveyards and sacred places in those areas that would be flooded or destroyed through the construction of the dam. The population would become refugees, forced to move away with their animals to other areas that are already inhabited by others from our community. It would cause overpopulation and poverty due to overgrazing in the neighboring areas. The construction of such dam would also lead to the importation of workers from the ‘developed’ majority communities in Namibia, who are mainly males, some of whom carry dangerous and incurable sexually transmitted diseases, such as the deadly HIV-AIDS pandemic, which would surely decimate of our less “civilized” communities. Moreover, the beneficiaries of the hydroelectricity will be those who live in the cities and not us.

We also are objecting to the removal of our firearms, that we have bought before the country became independent. In that time it was not usual to buy firearms, which are documented. Instead of the state creating a mechanism to ensure that we are not dispossessed of our property now, we are required to hand them over, without being reimbursed for the value of them. We do need firearms to protect ourselves and animals from wild animals that sometimes attack us.

Even so we are heavily taxed by the state, and pay for each sold or slaughtered animal, and pay value added tax (VAT) on any items bought, we are the most left behind in the entire country when it comes to roads, bridges, public buildings, health and education.

Even though there is a law decentralizing governmental functions to the regions, in fact the Government of Namibia is merely deconcentrating its powers and therefore demoralizing our administrative regional capacities. Administrative buildings are often not located in the capitals of our regions, and scattered in different townships far from each other, causing problems for our people to access them.
One of our main grievances is the lack of culturally appropriate schools for our communities. As semi nomadic people we need mobile schools, that allow our children to be well educated while moving with their community and animals. Since Norway that had funded our mobile schools has yielded their responsibility for these schools to the Government of Namibia, we see that these schools are either closed, the school tents and materials are no longer maintained, the transport to move the school tents and materials is now missing and we fear that the moving schools will decrease and no longer exist in the near future.

Starting from Grade 4 onwards, our children are by Namibian law educated in English and not in their mother language, causing our children to be left behind, as they do not understand fully what is being taught. The school system itself is very bad; our children are not receiving good education.

But worse off all, our children are forced to remove their traditional haircuts and attires, their entire cultural identity, and must cut their hair and dress in the western school uniforms if they want to be allowed to attend governmental schools. Many of our children refuse to do this. This school uniform rule is causing an enormous stress for our people, as we fear this will cause the loss of our culture and traditions by forcing our youth to change. Many of us don't send our children to school, because we do not want that. Also, we are compelled to pay school fees and the uniforms that many of us cannot afford.

We, the undersigning chiefs urge the UN and the World to intervene and help us and our people in our plight.

OUR DEMANDS:

We demand that our Kaokoland to be legally recognized by the state as our territory, that we have traditionally occupied and owned for centuries.

We insist that the Government of Namibia must stop without delay the implementation of the Communal Land Reform Act (Act 5 of 2002) that is resulting in the fencing off of our land and grabbing in our Kaokoland.

We demand that the Government of Namibia remove those foreign invaders in our territory that have illegally grabbed parts of our land without our consent.

We further demand that Namibia halts its plans to build a dam downstream of Epupa in Baynes Mountains.

We demand the mining companies to be removed from our territory, and otherwise we must be included in the entire process of giving out the mining permits and to o the access on the benefits.

We insist that the Government of Namibia cease and desist from further interference, manipulations and disempowerment of our customary tribal ancestral institutions.
We demand that our traditional governance structure to be fully respected and our traditional leaders without delay to be re-installed and recognized as traditional authorities of Kaokoland by the Government without delay.

We demand that the school laws to be amended to become culturally appropriate. We are opposed to our children being forced to remove their traditional customary attire in favor of a Western school uniform, if they want to attend school. Our children must have the right to remain with their cultural identity while receiving good education. We further demand that our children be taught in our own language, while receiving highly qualified English lessons that would ensure that they speak and write the mainstream language well.

We demand that we can cross, trade, sell and buy freely back and forth of the borders of Angola and Namibia. We are one people, and not to be separated and limited by borders.

We demand better health care and more hospitals and clinics in our areas, and that translation into our language is always facilitated.

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Chief Hikumine Kapika, area of Okanguati

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Chief Hosea Tjimuine, area of Otjondeka

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Chief Ronald Mumbuu, area of Ombombo

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Chief Thimoteus Kututa, area of Ombepera

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Chief Gerson Razapi Kavari, area of Otavi (Okaoko)

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Chief Festus Uetupa Ndai, area of Okorosave

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Chief Mbuze Uatiza Tijeura, area of Otjerunda
Chief Mujazire Ngumbi Tjamiru, area of Etanga

Chief Frans Uazeuerke Tjaurua, area of Okarivizu

Chief Stephanus Udakazapi, area of Otjondunda

Chief Kaahazongo Mbunguha, area of Otjivi

Chief Rikius Kujambwa, area of Ondore

Chief Kautaurua Maundu, area of Otjivero

Chief Veimba Muharukua, area of Ongongo

Chief Matheus Veenduavi Ruhozu, area of Ou Kongo

Chief Tjikarau Tjihamb, area of Orwe

Chief Muhihamo Tjindunda, area of Ehomba

Chief Maemujeke Mbendura, area of Epembe

Chief Hijamavare Mbinge, area of Oruvandjei
Chief Uatembaa Muheruka, area of Ozohaviria

Chief Jonas Ngombe, area of Orujilombo

Chief Hijazomanga Musaso, area of Ongango

Chief Muhomure Tjipliko, area of Omuangete

Chief Uezuvanjo Tjihape, area of Ovijere

Chief Uaandjerua Tjisuta, area of Ekoto

Chief Tjinae Tjinge, area of Ojikojo