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**NEWS RELEASE**

**OGIEK COUNCIL OF ELDERS FORMED TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY CONCERNS**

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**Nakuru – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010:** An Ogiek Council of Elders has been officially launched today to address the forest-dwelling community's concerns.

The historic development marks the very first time the indigenous community with attachment to Mau Forests Complex has formed its own leadership structure representing various forest blocks to work directly with the Government through the Interim Coordinating Secretariat (ICS).

The 60-member grassroots council endorsed its terms of reference on social welfare and environmental conservation, including the establishment of an Ogiek register based on family lineages, the development of proposals for resettlement and restoration of the forest as well as for supporting livelihood development of the community.

Mr. Joseph Towett was elected as chairman and Mr. Daniel Kobei as secretary at the function attended by district commissioners, regional commissioners, Rift Valley Deputy Provincial Commissioner John Ayienda as well as Interim Coordinating Secretariat officials led by the Chief Coordinator, Mr. Hassan Noor Hassan.

The formation of the one-year tenure Ogiek Council of Elders is part of the implementation of the repossession and restoration of the Mau Forests Complex. This follows several months of extensive consultations and preparation at the headquarters in Nairobi and field levels.

### **SURRENDERING OF TITLE DEEDS**

Since the Interim Coordinating Secretariat, through the Ministry of Lands, established Title Deeds Surrender Offices in the District Land Registrar offices in the Mau area (Bomet, Eldoret, Iten, Kapsabet, Kericho, Koibatek, Nakuru, Narok) as well as in Ardhi House in Nairobi, 38 title deeds have been surrendered with no claim for compensation.

The last two title deeds covering a total area of 250 acres were surrendered yesterday by Mr. Isaac Partoip, Chairman, Narok Town Council.

When unconditionally surrendering his titles, Mr. Partoip said: “As a conservationist, I feel it being a duty to surrender my title deeds to the Government”. He further called upon land owners in the Mau, in particular the large land owners “to surrender their titles as they do not need them”.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE III**

In addition to the above activities, the Government is progressing well in the implementation of Phase III of the repossession and restoration of the Mau Forests Complex. Phase III entails the recovery of titled forestland in Maasai Mau trust land forest. The Maasai Mau is an indigenous trust land forest, covering some 45,800 hectares, and managed by the Narok County Council. Over the last decade, some 43 per cent of the Maasai Mau trust land forest was allocated to individuals and companies mainly through illegal/irregular land allocation processes leading to massive destruction of the forest cover.

### ***Phase III: Survey and marking of the boundaries in Maasai Mau forest***

The survey and marking of the boundary in the Maasai Mau trust land forest and three other forest blocks was launched by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Lands, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, and the Ministry of Local Government on 9 February 2010.

The survey and marking of the boundary, led by Survey of Kenya is progressing very well. As of 31 March 2010, all the boundaries have been surveyed, except along Nkaroni, Enosokon and Enakishomi group ranches and along Nkareta and Naisoya adjudication sections. The remaining of the survey exercise is expected to be completed in five working days.

The boundaries surveyed are based on official government records that were analyzed by the Mau Task Force. These official boundaries are held on a map signed by the Director of Surveys and the Director of Kenya Forest Service on 3 March and 25 February, 2009, respectively.

### ***Phase III: Restoration of forestland in the Maasai Mau forest***

In addition to the above-mentioned activities a number of other interventions have already been implemented towards the restoration of the Maasai Mau trust land forest, with the support of development partners as well as local partners. The Spanish Government through UNEP, supported a Community Based Integrated Forest Resource Conservation and Management (COMIFORM) Project in the Maasai Mau trust land forest. The key partners include UNEP, Ewaso Ngiro South Development Authority, Narok County Council, Green Belt Movement, East Africa Wild Life Society and local communities. The main activities are:

- a) ***Development of a Management Plan for the Maasai Mau:*** The management plan has been developed in a participatory manner with the relevant Government bodies and the local communities and has been signed;
- b) ***Development of business plans for key economic activities:*** Business plans have been developed to promote alternative income generating activities, including

bee-keeping, dairy goats, energy briquette production and timber production and processing;

- c) ***Establishment of tree nurseries and woodlots***: Tree nurseries and woodlots have been established in 24 schools surrounding the Maasai Mau trust land forest and schools have been provided with water tanks;
- d) ***Forest restoration, including replanting***. Three leading corporate organisations, one parastatal and one non-governmental organisation, have joined hands to support the rehabilitation of the Maasai Mau trust land forest. They are: Equity Bank, East African Breweries Ltd, Nation Media Group, Kenya Wildlife Service and the Green Belt Movement. Together, they have committed Ksh50 million towards forest restoration. To date, they have already planted 25,000 trees in the Maasai Mau trust land forest near Naisoya in Narok District.

A proposal for the rehabilitation of the upper catchments of the Mara River is being developed by USAID with technical advice from the Interim Coordinating Secretariat. A team of experts was sent by USAID in late February/early March 2010 to make the necessary pre-assessments. The findings of the team of experts were presented and discussed during a USAID workshop held on 9 March 2010. A new team has been set up by USAID to design the project document based on the pre-assessments.

The Kenya Tourism Board has committed to provide support to the rehabilitation efforts in the Mara River basin, including the affected forest blocks and the sub-catchments outside the forest.

For further information, please contact

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### **Notes to the editors:**

In mid 2008, the Government embarked into a systematic approach towards resolving the complexity of issues in the Mau, while involving the large range of concerned stakeholders. A multi-stakeholder Task Force was established to assess, build consensus and make recommendations on the rehabilitation of the Mau.

The report of the Task Force was completed and submitted to the Government in March 2009. It was approved by the Cabinet on 30 July 2009 and Parliament on 15 September 2009.

In line with the Task Force recommendations, an Interim Coordinating Secretariat was established in the Office of the Prime Minister in September 2009. The mandate of the Interim Coordinating Secretariat is primarily to coordinate the implementation of the Mau Task Force recommendations. This coordination is to ensure an orderly, systematic and timely implementation involving the relevant Government's Ministries and stakeholders. The actual implementation is carried out by the relevant Ministries and stakeholders based on their mandate and capacity.

### **Progress made during Phases I and II**

The first two phases of the repossession of forestland in the Mau are almost complete. Phase I concerned the repossession of three forest areas that were excised from Eastern Mau Forest Reserve in 2001, but were yet to be allocated or occupied. The Government is at an advanced stage in the process of re-gazetting two of these areas. The third area, called Mariashoni, has been traditionally inhabited by Ogiek. The Interim Coordinating Secretariat is setting up a committee to work with the Ogiek in the rehabilitation of that forest area.

Phase II concerned the repossession of approx. 19,000 hectares in South Western Mau Forest Reserve of largely bamboo forest that have been encroached by illegal squatters. These squatters had no documentation to support their occupation of the forest. In

addition, the area encroached has never been set aside by the Government for settlement. It is still and remains a protected forest reserve.

The repossession of the 19,000 hectares was completed last December. The removal of the squatters took place peacefully, with the squatters leaving voluntarily the forest and the forest guards providing assistance. However, the return of the squatters to their former homes was stopped by some political leaders who demanded that the squatters be resettled or compensated. This was not provided for in the Mau Task Force report as it would create a dangerous and unsustainable precedent that would encourage people all over the country to invade government land in the hope of compensation. The Government has, however, mobilized several Ministries to assist the squatters returning to their home and to provide livelihood support to help them rebuild their lives.

To date, some 21,000 hectares of forestland in the Mau have been repossessed since the implementation of the Task Force report started some seven months ago.

In addition to the recovering of forestland, the Government has implemented a number of activities in support of the restoration of the Mau forest ecosystem, in particular with regard to: water catchment management; forest restoration including tree planting; law enforcement; Ogiek resettlement matters; and, resource mobilization.

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