

Statement on Joannah Stutchbury's Murder

Kenya, 16 July 2021: Today, we speak as environmentalists, conservationists, civil society organizations and advocates of the earth to demand action from our leaders, starting with the President of Kenya, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI), the Kenya Forestry Service and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, to thoroughly investigate the murder of Joannah Stutchbury. This Kenyan Environmental Defender was killed yesterday, 15th July 2021, at around 16h35 (EAT) just outside her home. Kenyan authorities must ensure that the killers, who dared to murder her in broad daylight, face the full force of the law.

The preamble of our Constitution states that we are "RESPECTFUL of the environment, which is our heritage, and determined to sustain it for the benefit of future generations" Article 42 guarantees all Kenyans the right to a clean and healthy environment.

Unless environmental defenders are effectively protected, we will be forced to continue to attend their burial ceremonies. Their only crime was to stand and protect the Constitution that we dearly love.

Crimes against the environment are the fourth largest criminal enterprise – only drugs, counterfeiting, and human trafficking beats it. Environmental crimes (experts prefer the term ecocide) ranks higher than the sales of illegal arms. Threats to active environmental protectors have claimed the lives of the courageous ivory investigator Esmond Bradley Martin, Esther Mwikali, Sengwer Robert Kiprotich, and forced Phyllis Omido and other environmental defenders into hiding recently.

We are alarmed at the rate at which human rights activists, environmentalists, and conservationists are threatened, harassed and killed each day in Kenya and worldwide. At the same time, the perpetrators continue to scour the country free from any repercussions.

Joannah was a dedicated and committed conservationist and an ambassador of the forest who never turned a blind eye when she saw illegalities within the Kiambu forest. We believe this is the reason why she was killed.

We are fully cognizant and applaud the President, His Excellency Uhuru Kenyatta, for condemning this act of cowardice from the perpetrators. Indeed, they saw no other way to silence our beloved Joannah - who made bold statements favouring the environment, including protecting our forests - but by killing her.

For this reason, we, as organizations from all parts of the country, the African region, and the world, condemn this senseless killing and call for justice for Joannah and all the other environmental and human rights activists who have lost their lives while defending the integrity of our environment and natural heritage. These fierce and courageous defenders have met their untimely death while trying to leave behind a better world for the next generation, for being the voices and guardians of the trees in the forests that give us the oxygen that we breathe and the wildlife that attracts billions of shillings as foreign currency from the tourists that visit this nation.

Protecting our environment, wetlands, and forests is not optional. It is a precondition for the survival of Kenya.

It is for all the above reasons that we demand:

A. The President

1. Ensure the DCI takes this matter seriously and proper investigations are done.
2. Direct the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, as well as the Kenya Forestry Service, to come up with a plan of protecting and, where appropriate, gazetting all forest lands in Kenya to shield them from land grabbers who see the forests as opportunities to enrich themselves at the expense of our environment and all Kenyans.
3. Nurture, protect and enhance the capacity of forest-dwelling and indigenous communities, like the Ogiek and Sengwer, to defend and protect our forests, lakes, and rivers.
4. To direct, with immediate effect, environmental activists' to stop being labelled as anti-development, nay-sayers, disruptors, or a nuisance.

B. The Directorate of Criminal Investigation

1. To thoroughly investigate Joannah's murder and not leave any stone unturned in their pursuit of the perpetrators. Further, to make public their status report within 14 days henceforth (by 30th July 2021)
2. To prosecute the perpetrators, including their agents and accomplices, of this cowardly and heinous act and ensure that justice is met.

C. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry

1. Coordinate with other relevant ministries and government departments to ensure our environment and forests are not afterthoughts whenever any decisions (be it development projects or otherwise) are made.
2. Work with environment activists, conservationists, forest-dwelling, and indigenous communities to reach a grassroots - grass tops solution to protect our environment, forests, rivers, and swamps from land grabbers.

This statement has been endorsed by the organizations and entities below:

1. deCOALonize Campaign Kenya
2. WildlifeDirect
3. Amnesty International Kenya
4. The Defenders Coalition
5. Center for Justice Governance & Environmental Action
6. Daima Coalition for Green Spaces protection
7. Centre for Natural Resource Governance – Zimbabwe.
8. Lawyers for Animal Protection in Africa
9. Centre for Citizens Conserving (CECIC)
10. Inuka Afrika
11. Ubuntu Leadership Academy
12. Champions for Human Rights Education, Mentorship & Advocacy (CHEMA - Initiative)
13. Biogas International Ltd
14. Mt. Kenya Network Forum
15. Creative Spills
16. Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI)
17. National Environment Civil Society Alliance of Kenya
18. Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education
19. Arid Lands Action Forum
20. St. Anne Nosirai primary conservation club.
21. Center for justice governance & Environmental Action
22. Africa Coal Network
23. Greenpeace Africa
24. Community Action for Nature Conservation CANCO
25. Africa Coal Network
26. Coordinator
27. Lekeh Development Foundation LEDEF
Nigerian Coal Network
28. Green World Kenya
29. Natural Justice
30. Centre for Alternative Development, Zimbabwe
31. Conservation Education Society
32. Kenya Environmental Action Network (KEAN)
33. Wild Law Institute
34. Sierra Leone School Green Clubs (SLSGC)
35. The Green Connection

36. MindMe International, Daima Coalition, Youth4SDGs- Kenya.
37. Amara Conservation
38. GIFSEP
39. 350Africa.org
40. Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG)
41. Power Shift Africa
42. Sustaining the Wild Coast
43. Anglican Church of Southern Africa - Environment Network (ACSA EN)
44. Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)