

REMARKS BY H.E. DAVID ANGELL
HIGH COMMISSIONER OF CANADA
AT THE LAUNCH OF ILEG'S SIAYA COMMUNITY CENTRE (ISCRC)
2:00 – 3:00 PM, FEBRUARY 20TH, 2015
ILEG'S OFFICE, SIALA PLAZA, SIAYA

HIS EXCELLENCY THE SIAYA GOVERNOR, CORNEL RASANGA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ILEG, BENSON OCHIENG,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

GOOD AFTERNOON.

LET ME START BY THANKING THE GOOD PEOPLE OF SIAYA FOR THE WARM WELCOME TO YOUR COUNTY. IT IS A PLEASURE FOR ME TO BE HERE, ALBEIT AT THE TAIL END OF YOUR PROGRAM TODAY.

I ALSO WISH TO THANK THE INSTITUTE OF LAW AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE, ILEG, FOR THE GOOD WORK THEY ARE DOING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR CANADA FUND FOR LOCAL INITIATIVES (CFLI).

AND IT IS AN HONOR FOR ME TO JOIN YOU IN THE LAUNCH OF THE SIAYA COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE.

IT IS ALWAYS A PLEASURE FOR ME TO GET OUT AND SEE WHAT OUR PARTNERS ARE DOING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

LAND ISSUES IN KENYA HAVE A LONG AND PAINFUL PAST. CANADA LAUDS THE PEOPLE OF KENYA FOR HAVING TAKEN STEPS TO BEGIN ADDRESSING HISTORICAL LAND INJUSTICES, BY PASSING A CONSTITUTION THAT SECURES THE LAND RIGHTS

OF KENYANS, THAT GUARANTEES EQUITABLE ACCESS TO LAND FOR ALL, ONE THAT PROMOTES SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ELIMINATING GENDER DISCRIMINATION OF LAND OWNERSHIP IN LAW.

BUT YOU WILL AGREE WITH ME WHEN I SAY THAT RESOLVING LAND ISSUES IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS PASSING LEGISLATION OR PROPOSING REFORMS.

LAND IS AN EMOTIONAL ISSUE.

IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOODS, IT IS ABOUT THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE, IT IS ABOUT BIG AND SMALL BUSINESS AND IT IS ALSO ABOUT THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF A COUNTY.

ALL THESE MAY SEEM LIKE COMPETING INTERESTS, BUT THROUGH CAREFUL DELIBERATION, AGREEMENT AND COOPERATION THESE INTERESTS CAN ACTUALLY BE COMPLIMENTARY AND MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL.

I AM HAPPY TO NOTE THAT THIS IS THE DIALOGUE THAT ILEG HAS BEGUN WITH THE PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT OF SIAYA.

I AM ALSO PLEASED TO SEE THAT YOU ARE ENGAGING WITH NATIONAL BODIES SUCH AS THE NATIONAL LAND COMMISSION WHOSE MANDATE IS TO LOOK INTO HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES OVER LAND.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, LAND RIGHTS ARE ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS. A DISPOSSESSED COMMUNITY IS A DISEMPOWERED COMMUNITY.

KENYA HAS HAD AN UNFORTUNATE HISTORY OF LAND-RELATED CORRUPTION, IN WHICH THE RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES HAVE BEEN INFRINGED UPON.

KENYA IS A COUNTRY IN WHICH ONLY 20 PERCENT OF THE LAND IS SUITABLE FOR AGRICULTURE, YET 80 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION RELIES ON AGRICULTURE FOR SURVIVAL-- SO THE MANAGEMENT OF LAND AND THE GUARANTEE OF LAND RIGHTS IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE.

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT CANADA HAS HAD A LONG HISTORY OF LAND GRIEVANCES AS WELL, AND NEITHER DO WE HAVE THE PERFECT SOLUTION FOR RESOLVING THEM.

THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES - OR FIRST NATIONS - OF CANADA HAVE HAD LONG STANDING LAND DISPUTES WITH SUCCESSIVE CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS DATING FROM OVER 150 YEARS AGO.

TO DATE, THERE ARE STILL OVER 700 UNRESOLVED LAND CASES UNDER DISCUSSION. THE PROCESS FOR RESOLUTION HAS EVOLVED OVER TIME, WITH MANY VALUABLE LESSONS BEING LEARNED OVER TIME.

THE PROCESS OF RESOLVING LAND DISPUTES IS A LONG ONE AND CALLS FOR PATIENCE.

ON NATURAL RESOURCES, WE WELCOME THE OPENING OF A MAJOR NATURAL RESOURCES SECTOR IN KENYA, WHICH PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO GENERATE RESOURCES WITH WHICH TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES.

BUT IT MUST BE DONE SENSITIVELY.

THE SECTOR CAN ONLY THRIVE IF IT BENEFITS THE HOST GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND IF IT IS COMMERCIALY ATTRACTIVE TO CAPABLE, RESPONSIBLE COMPANIES.

WITH THE DISCOVERY OF NATURAL EXTRACTIVE RESOURCES IN AN AREA, LAND BECOMES EVEN MORE VALUABLE FOR THOSE WHO OWN IT, AND FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO EXTRACT THE RESOURCE.

IT IS NOT SURPRISING THEN WHEN CONFLICT AND DISPUTE ARISE OVER THE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE LAND.

IT IS THEREFORE IMPORTANT FOR THE KENYAN PUBLIC TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO BUILD A DISPOSITION WHICH CAN HELP FACILITATE THE LAND REFORMS AGENDA TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES.

I WISH TO COMMEND ILEG FOR OPENING UP THE SIAYA COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE AS A SPACE WHERE THIS KIND OF ENGAGEMENT CAN TAKE PLACE.

CHAPTER FIVE OF YOUR CONSTITUTION ENCOURAGES THE RESOLUTION OF LAND DISPUTES THROUGH COMMUNITY INITIATIVES, SUCH AS THIS ONE THAT CANADA IS PROUD TO SUPPORT.

CANADA IS A FIRM BELIEVER AND SUPPORTER OF INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

COMMUNITIES HAVE A RIGHT TO FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT ON THE USE OF THEIR LAND.

I WOULD LIKE TO CLOSE BY ONCE AGAIN EXPRESSING MY THANKS TO GOVERNOR RASANGA, ILEG AND THE PEOPLE OF SIAYA, AND TO APPLAUD YOU FOR THE WORK BEING DONE TO WORK TOGETHER IN BETTER MANAGING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON ISSUES RELATED TO LAND REFORM.

I AM PLEASED CANADA WAS ABLE TO PLAY A SMALL ROLE IN SUPPORTING YOU IN THIS IMPORTANT AREA OF GOVERNANCE.

THANK YOU.

ASANTE SANA.