



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

First People of the Kalahari / Roy Sesana (Botswana)

(2005)



Roy Sesana

" for resolute resistance against eviction from their ancestral lands, and for upholding the right to their traditional way of life."

Roy Sesana is also known as Tobee Tcori – his Bushman name. He is a leader of the Gana, Gwi and Bakgalagadi Bushmen . As such, he is one of their most eloquent spokespeople. He was born in a Bushman community, Molapo, in Botswana, at least 50 years ago – he doesn't know his precise age. He spent a few years as a labourer in South Africa before returning to the central Kalahari in 1971, to train as a traditional healer.

The 4,000 Gana and Gwi were amongst the last Bushmen living on and from their own land in a largely self-sufficient way. In 1997 and 2002, after years of harassment, the Botswana government evicted them, along with their neighbours the Bakgalagadi, from their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) despite international protests.

Officials closed their borehole, poured away their water, and threatened to burn them in their huts if they did not move. Some of those who stayed were tortured and accused of overhunting . In 2004, Sesana's brother died after a beating by wildlife officials. Even so, since 1992, more than 200 Bushmen have evaded the guards and returned to their lands. Most of the Bushmen are now in miserable resettlement camps, unable to hunt or gather and dependent on government hand-outs and support. It is thought that the evictions were motivated by the desire to mine diamonds on Bushmen lands. A number of concessions have already been granted.

Sesana is one of the founders of First People of the Kalahari (FPK), which was set up in 1991 to campaign for the Bushmen's human rights, and especially their land rights. Sesana became chairman of FPK in 1995 and stayed in post until 2000 when he stepped down to concentrate on FPK's fieldwork in the Bushman communities. FPK has established itself as one of the most outspoken defenders of Bushman rights in Botswana, earning itself increasing levels of government surveillance. Their telephones are tapped, their visitors monitored and they are publicly vilified by the government. FPK have also helped provide legal support for the hunters who were arrested in 1999, and produced a report on the torture incident, as well as organising a mapping project of traditional territories and communities that succeeded in getting many of them registered as official residents in the reserve. A combination of lack of funds and government repression threatens the continued

existence of the organisation, but it has been successful in gaining wide international concern for the Bushmen's predicament.

Since the 2002 evictions, and despite serious government intimidation, Sesana has carried on his work, and is trying to encourage his colleagues to leave the government camps, which he calls "places of death", and go home. In Botswana's longest-running trial, the Bushmen took the Botswana government to court in a test case that soon became symbolic of the struggle of indigenous people everywhere. Sesana's central role in this legal action has resulted in him being acknowledged as the unspoken leader of the Bushmen in the Central Kalahari.

In December 2006, after a four year long and extremely expensive trial, Botswana's High Court ruled in favour of the Bushmen. The judges found that the government had illegally tried to evict them from their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. However, the High Court did not rule that the Government had to provide essential services to those living in the reserve. The Bushmen now face tough conditions imposed by officials when they try to move back to their ancestral lands.

Further information and comments on the case of the Bushmen can be obtained from [Survival International](#) (Right Livelihood Award Recipient 1989), a London-based organization for the rights of tribal people, which works closely with the First People of the Kalahari.

Quotation

"We are the ancestors of our grandchildren's children. We look after them, just as our ancestors look after us. We aren't here for ourselves. We are here for each other and for the children of our grandchildren."

Roy Sesana

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