

A statement on the *Batwa's* Participation in economic and development policy making in Uganda
Presented to the 3rd session of United Nations forum on minority issues in Geneva Switzerland 14th -
15th December 2010.

My name is James Male Kiwalabye from Uganda, representing Uganda National NGO Forum, a platform organization for all civil society organizations in Uganda.

Introduction

The "*Batwa*" ethnic minority group of Uganda live in the south western region of Uganda and dispersed across to five districts. They formally lived in the Bwindi impenetrable national forest of Uganda . After their eviction in 1990 by the tourism body and promoters, they now live in the neighboring forests'. The Batwa currently are taken as ,a "population" rather than people. It is believed that they are 'a temporary society, that is back ward and they will at one time be modernized and join a dominant society.

The Batwa are landless people and they live by hunting and gathering from forests and they do it illegally because they are always at watch by government and wildlife authority. Their eviction from the forest was however done forcefully without their consent and any public hearing. While the tourism authority grants the Batwa with land leases for a short period of time, some cannot afford to pay such fees and they have to live as squatters on their neighbors' land. This limits their economic productivity.

The Batwa unlike other marginalized groups of people are not represented in decision making organs like parliament and lower local government organs. This means that all policies and guidelines on their employment is passed without- their input: The legislators and employers therefore design what they feel is good on their behalf.

The health system in Uganda for minorities is so poor and affects negatively on the health of Batwa work force. The minority members are not planned for because of resources and effective representation. This means that the Batwa community cannot produce healthy and energetic labour force to compete with other people on the market.

Recommendations

- The government of Uganda should include minority people as special categories in all decision making organs to ensure participation and representation of minority people. Minority people should not be generalised under special interest groups which are dominated by other empowered marginalised groups like the disabled and army.
- Trade unions and employers should put in place affirmative action for minority people that put into consideration the education level of minority people in the country.
- The United Nations should put in place a fund that support the minority people organisations and minority rights activists to advocate for their rights at national and international levels. This fund will help to mitigate the barriers that hinder minority people from participating in economic and policy development processes in the country.

¹ Wairama G.Baker 2001.