

PRESS STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED LAMU PORT
Read by Mohamed Ali Baddi – Chief Petitioner

Lamu County has one of the smallest populations in Kenya. Its' indigenous people are Bajuni, Orma, Boni, Swahili, Pokomo, Mijikenda and Kore-Masai. These indigenous ethnic groups have been collectively and grossly marginalized in all aspects of development. This marginalization started from the colonial era and has continued through three successive Kenyan regimes up to the present. We are permanent squatters on our own ancestral lands, which we have occupied for over 2000 years. We have seen the government giving our land to senior government officials, tycoons, AND other Kenyans while the indigenous people have remained landless despite repeated demands to the Government.

As is widely known, land tenure insecurity is linked inextricably to poverty and in Lamu the situation is extreme as many locals still depend on natural resources to sustain their livelihoods, including fishing, honey collection, pastoralism, farming, and mangrove harvesting. Improper use of public land, land grabbing and unsustainable use of resources in Lamu has therefore led it to be one of the most under developed counties in Kenya. The ethnic tension that exists due to the inequality in land tenure between the indigenous community and immigrants could therefore potentially develop into conflict if not resolved immediately. As such, the Lamu community is greatly alarmed by the threats posed by the Lamu port after the government has failed to involve us in the project, has failed to enact land reforms and has failed to stop land speculation in the area.

Lamu people have had a prosperous Port and maritime economy for centuries. By their cultural instinct and rationale they cannot oppose the construction of a new modern port. What they are opposed to is the "secrecy" in which the project is being implemented, the failure to implement an environmental impact assessment (EIA), and the lack of consultation with Lamu people. The community demands are therefore:-

1. Full information be made available to Lamu people and all Kenyans
2. Community consultation must be undertaken with Lamu people
3. An Environmental Impact Assessment must be carried out immediately by an independent group of experts
4. The economic impact on the existing maritime resources and displacement of people on mainland must be studied thoroughly and compensation given.
5. A Guarantee that the Cultural heritage of Lamu people will be preserved.
6. Provide a Mechanism for benefit-sharing between the national government and county government be spelled out upon the installation of the new government
7. Ensure that the rights and benefits of the indigenous communities are protected amidst the drastic population increase expected in the development of a new port
8. An assurance from the government that all historical land rights violations against the indigenous Lamu communities and the ongoing illegal land allocations are adequately investigated and addressed, and to put in place measures to ensure the rights of indigenous communities to own land are guaranteed

These are the simple demands of the Lamu people with regard to the construction of the new Lamu Port. The Government has not addressed our concerns despite our peaceful protests and communication with them. Therefore, we have joined forces as a coalition of community groups to file a petition in court so as to protect our constitutional rights through justice. We anticipate that the Government will respect our new constitution and will imbibe the spirit and conform to it by hearing and addressing our concerns.