



MEDIA RELEASE: STOP THE BEIFA COAL PROJECT AND THE PERSECUTION OF THE DINDE COMMUNITY IN HWANGE, ZIMBABWE

By Simiso Mlevu Posted May 17, 2021 In Campaigns, Front

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

17 May 2021

Civil society groups in the SADC region, East Africa, West Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America join hands in calling on the government of Zimbabwe to drop the case and all charges against the Vice-Chair of Dinde Residents Association, Never Tshuma, who was arrested for allegedly inciting the community against a proposed coal project in Dinde. Tshuma's case is being heard today in court. A statement (see below) just released by these groups is further demanding that the Government reflects and considers the plight of the community of Dinde in Hwange, Matabeleland North Province that is facing imminent displacement to pave way for the coal mining and thermal power project. The project is owned by some Chinese nationals incorporated as Beifa Investments. We are alarmed that despite consistent resistance by the Dinde community for the past two years, these concerns have not been listened to. Instead, the community is facing threats and, harassment and the arrest of Tshuma.

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The Dinde community – a mix of indigenous Nambya and Tonga tribes has lived in this area since around 300AD. They have adapted to their environment and are famous for craft and cattle breeding. The area to be affected, spanning across three rural wards – is home to thousands of families. At full scale, the project will destroy at least 13 schools, a dip tank, thousands of homesteads, cultural heritage sites that include the gravesite of local traditional chiefs and several cemeteries. Further, the community has raised concern about the destruction of their ecosystems due to the proposed project – especially pollution of the Nyantuwe River which is the life of this community. They also worry that the proposed 270megawatt thermal power station is going to affect air quality and exacerbate climate change in the region. Matabeleland North Province is in Natural Regions 1V and V which are classified as arid and semi-arid.

Beifa Investments reportedly told the community it has no financial resources to fund relocation, especially building a standard infrastructure for the affected families. We are deeply concerned that this project is going to increase the vulnerability of women and children in this community. Beifa Investments' enclosure and subsequent pollution of the Nyantuwe River means women will walk longer distances to search for water and escort children to school.

We call on the governments of Zimbabwe to halt the proposed project and invest the same financial resources in renewable energy which is less harmful to the environment and communities and yet can achieve the same objective. We will also be following up with a call to the Chinese government and financiers of Beifa Investments to abandon the fossil project, which can result in extensive destruction of flora and fauna and join the growing number of financial institutions using their money to save the planet instead of baking it.

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TO THE ZIMBABWEAN GOVERNMENT:

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Stop the Beifa Coal Project and the Violation of the Rights of the Dinde Community in Hwange, Zimbabwe

17 May 2021

The undersigned organizations are deeply concerned with events unfolding in the Dinde Community in Hwange District of Zimbabwe where a Chinese company, Beifa Investments, have started exploration work for coal despite clear objection by the local community. The Chinese investor has vowed to continue with the exploration project despite the community protests and went further to disclose its intention to set up a thermal power station in that community. The special grant issued to Beifa Investments covers 4070 Hectares in 4 wards, namely ward 13, 14, 19 and 20. We are further concerned with remarks attributed to the Minister of State for Matabeleland North Affairs Mr. Richard Moyo who threatened that his government will not tolerate any resistance to the project by the community, arguing that protesters will be arrested. His threats came barely two weeks after the Vice Chairperson of Dinde Residents Association was arrested for resisting the mine. Never Tshuma is currently out on bail and his case will be heard in court on 17th May 2021.

We stand in support of Never Tshuma and the community and are alarmed by and oppose the repression of community activists who are defending their land, environment, cultural rights, and livelihoods. This statement further calls for the charges to be dropped and the case to be dismissed.

Villagers argue that the Beifa investments are in breach of environmental and customary laws of the country as they have not engaged the community for a social license. They fear that, should the coal project continue, some will be subjected to forced relocations while others will be exposed to air and water pollution, especially from Nyantuwe River which provides drinking water for humans and livestock. Villagers also fear loss of livelihoods and grazing land for their livestock; destruction of cultural heritage sites like graveyards for the Nekatambe Chieftainship and also cultural site for ordaining traditional leaders. The proposed site for the project also has economically significant features like a dip tank which was donated to the community by the USAID and the village cattle sale pen.

THE RIGHT TO SAY NO



According to Dinde Residents Association, from February 2019 to December 2019, a team of Chinese nationals would tour the village without consulting or engaging locals. In December 2019, the same team brought some lightweight machinery and set up a camp in the village. Locals mobilised each other and approached the Chinese to establish the nature of business they were undertaking in the area. In a show of resistance, locals ordered them to leave and return with documents granting them permission to work in Dinde. Thereafter, the Chinese investors have visited Dinde community with several officers from the Environmental Management Agency; Hwange Rural District Council; Traditional Leadership; members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Zimbabwe National Army and a local miner.

DINDE COMMUNITY HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Dinde Community is in Ward 13 in Hwange Rural District Council. It is home to thousands of Nambyas and Tongas with a preponderance of the Tonga who first settled in Hwange district up to Victoria Falls right upstream of the Zambezi River between 300 AD and 400 AD. The Nambyas tracked in from Masvingo in the early 19th century. According to local traditional leader, most people who settled in Dinde area were relocated by the Rhodesian government in 1920 to pave way for the Hwange National Park. The area has had five Chiefs since its establishment in 1920 and four of the chiefs who have passed on were buried near the site where the Chinese want to mine. The community depends on subsistence farming but also specialise on livestock production as soils are predominantly barren. The people of Dinde depend on Nyantuwe River for drinking water – both for humans and livestock.

We call upon the Government of Zimbabwe to:

- Immediately halt the Beifa Investments Project and address the concerns raised by the Dinde community
- Stop intimidation campaigns and threats to the Dinde community resisting the proposed project
- Drop all charges and the case against Never Tshuma
- Listen to the community's energy and development needs and find alt

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This statement is endorsed by the following organisations:

350Africa.org

Africa Coal Network

Africa Climate Justice Group

Alternative Information & Development Centre, Cape Town

Amigas de la Tierra/Friends of the Earth Spain

Amnesty International Zimbabwe

Centre for Citizens Conserving

Centre for Natural Resource Governance

deCOALonize Campaign

Denver Justice & Peace Committee

Dinde Residents Association

Ecologistas en Acción-Spain

Friends of Lake Turkana

Friends of the Earth Spain

Global Justice Ecology Project

Global Rights

Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) Africa

GroundWork, Friends of the Earth South Africa

Igapo Project – France

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Leave it in the Ground Initiative

London Mining Network

Lupane Youth for Development Trust

Matabeleland Institute for Human Rights

Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de los Derechos Sociales y Ambientales

Rivers without Boundaries Coalition

Rural Development Policy Institute

Oyu Tolgoi Watch

People's Dialogue Southern Africa

Power Shift Africa

Rettet den Regenwald, Germany

Salva la Selva, Spain

Southern Africa Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power

Southern Africa Resource Watch

Southern African Rural Women's Assembly

Sustainable Holistic Development Foundation

The Corner House, UK

The Gaia Foundation (UK)

Trust for Community Outreach and Education, South Africa

Witness Radio – Uganda

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Zimbabwe Natural Resource Forum

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