



THE UGANDA LAND ALLIANCE

PRESS STATEMENT

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KAMPALA: STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, 8TH MARCH 2010

As the entire world celebrates the International Women's Day, the Uganda Land Alliance (ULA) wishes to express deep concern over continued violation of women's rights, particularly the right to own land. This happens despite international legal provisions stipulating absolute equality of the human fold irrespective of sex. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for example states in part that "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...*", but in Uganda today, this provision seems to have been blatantly ignored.

While it may be said that most women are denied access to land due to their failure to legalize their marriages, research indicates that even officially married women are denied rights to land due to the patriarchal family arrangement in most parts of Uganda. In Luweero and Kapchorwa for example, only 36% and a paltry 8% of married women respectively, own land.

The Alliance observes that ignorance and inconsistencies in our laws have played a key role in exacerbating the age-old oppression of women. During a recent research carried out in the central region, ULA came across a case of Mrs. Arorwa, an insurance broker, and resident of Namugongo, an urban area about 20 Kilometers from Kampala City. She struggled to secure a bank loan to purchase a piece of land, and another (loan) to build a house, but registered the properties in her husband's names as head of the household. When the marriage went sour, Mr. Arorwa got a mistress, and decided to mortgage the house without the official wife's consent. For fear of "insubordination", Mrs. Arorwa chose not to pursue a court case against the husband but her suffering only took an uglier turn when Mr. Arorwa sought to sell the house altogether.

Mrs. Arorwa's situation was only abated when a lawyer friend, Mrs. Kaweesi helped her lodge a caveat on the property under Section 39 of the Land Act, which permits a spouse not being owner of land to lodge a caveat on the Certificate of Title, barring any transactions on land without the consent of the other spouse.

Mr. Arorwa was then taken to the area police station where an agreement was reached that he would pay child support and leave Mrs. Arorwa with the house lest the law catches up with him. He committed to this in writing and at this point, Mrs. Arorwa was saved from the “jaws of a crocodile”.

ULA will not sit back while the situation of women’s land rights concerns remains unchanged. The Alliance is carrying the torch to provide a ray of light that will empower women in their quest for equal rights to land. At least 2000 women in the districts of Mbale (Eastern region), Kibaale and Ntungamo (Western region), Mukono (Central region) and Pader (Northern region) are receiving training in advocating for their rights, and the rights of others. This is in furtherance to the already ongoing awareness raising programmes in the districts of Luweero, Kapchorwa, Amuru, Apac, Katakwi and Moroto. Radio programmes have also been prepared to increase this awareness campaign throughout this year.

While we appreciate the fact that some women’s land rights issues have so far been incorporated in the current Draft Four of the national Land Policy under review, we call on government to also show responsibility by translating and simplifying such legislation into various local languages to enable Ugandans understand, and later exercise their rights. Parliament must also pay deliberate attention to women’s concerns over land and pass fair laws that affect all citizens equally.

“Everyone must remember that women’s land rights are human rights, and there’s therefore no need for further justification. Women’s ownership and control of land buttresses their sense of identity, and enables them live with dignity....human dignity”, says Esther Obaikol, the Executive Director, Uganda Land Alliance.

The Uganda Land Alliance (ULA) is a consortium of national, regional and international civil society organizations and individuals, lobbying and advocating for fair land laws and policies that address the land rights of the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and individuals in Uganda.