

Zimbabwe: Court Stops Eviction by First Lady

Tendai Kamhungira, *Daily News* (Harare)

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HARARE—High Court judge Erica Ndewere has granted a provisional order to stop the evictions of Mazowe residents at Manzou Farm following an application by six people who are part of the affected families.

The six are part of approximately 200 families who are facing eviction in a move reportedly aimed at paving way for First Lady Grace Mugabe's private wildlife sanctuary.

Through their lawyer Tonderai Bhatasara, Leonard Mukoore, Samson Jekera, Chenjerai Murambisa, Livingstone Musanhi, Tapiwa Dhaisi and Phaniel Chingoriwo had filed the application against Home Affairs Minister Kembo Mohadi, police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri and Lands Minister, and Rural Resettlement Douglas Mombeshora to oppose their ejection.

"The order has the effect of ensuring that the applicants' houses should not be demolished and the residents should not be evicted from their homes," the letter said, adding the chamber ruling was made in their favour after Ndewere had agreed that it was urgent.

In one of his key arguments, Mukoore told the court that he and other families have been staying at Anold Farm since the year 2000.

"We have been staying there and regarded the farm as our home. Ever since we moved to the farm, we have engaged the government in order for us to regularise our stay," he said.

"The government promised to give us offer letters for alternative... land. Until now we have not been given the... letters," Mukoore added.

The Mashonaland Central farmer also told the court that police officers came to the farm last Wednesday and Thursday, and started destroying their homes without a court order to do that.

"I aver that we will suffer irreparable harm if the court does not intervene to save us. More specifically in that, we have crops that are yet to mature," he said.

"We rely on the crops for food, income and subsistence. If we lose our crops, we will starve to death and our children will not be able to go school as there will be no fees, uniforms and books. Our children are to open schools on Tuesday, 13 January 2015. If we are evicted, they will be stranded," Mukoore said.

Despite spirited attempts by Zanu PF and provincial governor Martin Dinha that Grace was not part of the callous actions, several people and observers have remained sceptical about the development.

“We are especially distressed by the latest claim, which is completely... baseless, that Dr Grace has... anything to do with the on-going eviction of people from Manzou Farm, which authorities say was designated not as a residential area but a national heritage site...” it said in a statement.

“We view this relentless onslaught on the good name of Dr Mugabe as politically-motivated and call upon all those who are behind this... to stop it forthwith,” the ruling party said.

Dinha, whom affected families at Manzou claim is fully aware of their plight, said the province was allegedly making efforts to restore the farm to its status, but did not give a further explanation.

“It (the farm) has nothing to do with the First Family... This business of abusing the name of the first lady, her privacy and integrity must come to an end,” he said.

“Zimbabwe is not a banana republic as wished by some people and we have not deteriorated to that level of lawlessness and anarchy,” the trained lawyer said at the weekend.

On Friday, ex-Justice deputy minister Fortune Chasi reminded the government to be sensitive to the plight of the 200 people and he was going to work with the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) to help the traumatised lot.

“I have been to my constituency and have witnessed evidence of the displaced people. Given that the atmosphere is charged and tense, I was unable to do anything,” the Mazowe South legislator said.

“There were armed police evicting people and what can I do under those circumstances as I become powerless since the whole matter involves the First Family,” Chasi said.

However, observers insist that the Gushungo Holdings founder had confirmed her interest in the farm mid last year and viciously attacked the former Reserve Bank senior staffer after accusing him of trying to frustrate her bid to acquire more farming land in the area.

“I know that some politicians in the province misinformed her that I was fighting her bid to occupy the area and it is very unfortunate,” Chasi said on this allegation.

“The fact is, affected families only appealed to me for help as their MP, and I never intended to fight the first lady,” he said.

In her diatribe against Chasi, Grace said the lawyer was “terrorising” her in the area, where she owns a number of farms and runs her orphanage.

She also accused him of spreading falsehoods about her and her commercial intentions, if not ventures.

At the time, the 49-year-old businesswoman also claimed Chasi had also alleged the first lady had engineered the eviction of a famous traditional healer from Henderson Farm.

Grace also disclosed she had had running battles with people in Mazowe, who had accused her of grabbing land, including an Interfresh Limited farm and yet it was the provincial leadership, which had allocated her a portion of the ex-listed company’s land that was lying idle.

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Photo on front page: Hopeless villagers sit beside a razed hut at Manzou farm in Mazowe after 11 January 2015 evictions and demolitions. Source: Shepherd Tozvireva/[News Day](#). Photo on this page: Robert and Grace Mugabe. Source: [Harare 24 News](#).