



DEFORESTATION OF MAZWI NATURE RESERVE MONITORING REPORT



(17 August 2021)





1.0 INTRODUCTION

On the 1st of August 2021, Matabeleland Institute for Human Rights (MIHR) received a complaint from St Peters village residents in Bulawayo ward 17 to the effect that Khami Prison officials and inmates are causing deforestation in areas adjacent to the village, chopping down trees for firewood purposes.

MIHR instituted a monitoring and verification exercise to establish the validity of the residents' complaints. This Monitoring Report is therefore a result of the actual monitoring that was conducted and the information gathered through local key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Monitoring Report concludes that Khami Prison (through officials and inmates) are causing massive deforestation within Mazwi Nature Reserve and the surrounding areas by massively chopping down big trees for firewood purposes. This development which happens on broad day light nearly on a daily basis, has been going on for a long time now on the areas around the prison.

There is therefore need for urgent action by all responsible authorities to immediately stop this prevailing practice that is causing environmental rights and other human rights violations to surrounding communities.

3.0 MONITORING FINDINGS

3.1 Deforestation Perpetrators

On Friday 13 and Saturday 14 August 2021, the MIHR Monitoring Team witnessed first-hand acts of deforestation by the Khami Prison officials and inmates within the Mazwi Nature Reserve area. The deforesting teams were spotted at 1141am on Friday 13 August 2021 and at 1148am on Saturday 14 August 2021.

On Friday 13 August 2021 the MIHR Monitoring Team saw a team of Khami Prison inmates accompanied by Prison officials chopping trees. While exiting the Reserve area, the Team met a Khami Prison Tractor being driven by a Prison official in official uniform and attached with a trailer moving towards the deforesting team. The tractor plate number was ZPS021P. The Monitoring Team did not capture the full plate number of the trailer. This picture shows the tractor and the trailer taken from behind.





On Saturday 14 August 2021, the Monitoring Team met a Team of about 8 prison inmates being accompanied by 3 prison guards just coming from deforesting the area. They were also carrying axes in bags. The team followed their trail and found heaps of chopped tree trunks at the Nature Reserve guard room. This picture shows the prison inmates that were met by the monitoring team:

The Monitoring Team also spotted 3 different and separate fire cooking spots that are being used for cooking purposes which indicates that the deforesting teams come to the area regularly and spend the whole day there.



This evidence makes MIHR conclude with certainty that Khami Prison officials are deforesting the Mazwi Nature Reserve.

3.2 Scale of Deforestation

The scale of deforestation within the Mazwi Nature Reserve is massive and risking the extinction of a variety of fauna within the Reserve area. The MIHR Monitoring Team noted that the deforesters are targeting big trees which they chop down and collect their stems leaving the branches there. This habit was also observed on the other side of Khami Prison (towards Bilas) on the banks of Khami River.

A variety of trees that include Mopani, Umganu (Marula), Umkhaya, Mangwe, were being targeted.



Within the Mazwi Nature Reserve area, the MIHR Team did a random count of the chopped trees and counted above 165 trees. The Team is still continuing with the actual count of the number of trees chopped down. The pictures below show the chopped down trees within the Mazwi Nature Reserve:





4.0 OTHER MONITORING CONCERNS

4.1 Negligence by Bulawayo City Council Rangers

The Bulawayo City Council Rangers seem to be deliberately turning a blind eye to this massive deforestation happening within the Mazwi Nature Reserve area. The Khami Prison deforesters are chopping big trees during broad daylight and the sound of their axes can be heard at a distance. When they have chopped down the trees they use tractors to collect the wood. All this is happening during the day and it is concerning why the Bulawayo City Council Rangers are not intercepting them and stopping this action.

With the sound of axes, the frequency of the deforestation and size of trees being chopped down, the modes of transport being used to ferry the wood, the history of deforestation by Khami Prison and the wide public knowledge around St Peters on the actions of Khami Prison – there is no way the Bulawayo City Council can profess ignorance of this action.

4.2 Unfair treatment by Bulawayo City Council Rangers

Villagers who spoke to the MIHR Team complained of unfair treatment by the Bulawayo City Council rangers. They said that when local villagers take wheelbarrows and scotch carts to collect firewood within the Nature Reserve area they are arrested by the Bulawayo City Council rangers and their implements confiscated. They felt the behavior of the Rangers was grossly unfair considering that some of the villagers will be collecting that which has been abandoned and left behind by the Khami Prison deforesting teams. The villagers questioned why the Rangers are not arresting the Khami Prison teams who are destroying living trees but instead arrest the villagers who are merely collecting branches and twigs and are not destroying any tree.

4.3 Risk of Veld Fires

On Saturday 14 August 2021, the Monitoring Team observed a cooking spot which had extinguished fire-logs but the ashes were still harboring hot charcoals which created a risk of veld fires considering that it is during the fire season and there is a lot of tall dry grass in the area. Should veld fires occur in that area, a lot of fauna and flora will be destroyed and it will grossly affect the St Peters Villagers whose goats and cattle also graze within the Nature Reserve area.



4.4 Livelihoods Threatened

Deforestation (especially of the Mopani trees) is causing a threat to the livelihoods of the surrounding communities who depend on Mopani worms (amacimbi) as a nutritional delicacy and an economic livelihood opportunity. Some of the trees being chopped down (such as Umganu tree) are sources of food and indigenous medicine. Deforestation further



disturbs the water cycle and trees provide a vegetative canopy that is important for reducing surface runoff and promoting percolation.

4.5 Climate change threat

Deforestation worsens the St Peters Village and other surrounding communities' susceptibility and vulnerability to climate change effects. The chopped down trees are an important natural vegetative canopy which acts as wind breakers and thus reducing the impact of violent storms and whirlwinds.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

This Monitoring report therefore recommends the following:

- 5.1 The Khami Prison be held accountable and made to stop deforesting Mazwi Nature Reserve area and the communities surrounding the prison.
- 5.2 Khami Prison be encouraged and assisted to use alternative sources of fuel for cooking purposes other than firewood. These alternative fuel sources include biogas and coke (or coal).
- 5.3 Bulawayo City Council officials institute an urgent inquiry into the ineptitude of the Council Rangers in protecting the areas from deforestation by Khami Prison.
- 5.4 An environmental restorative justice mechanism be implemented where the Khami Prison is made to replant trees within the deforested areas in order to replenish the destroyed trees.
- 5.5 Bulawayo City Council solicit for partnerships with reputable and experienced nature conservation agencies for the purposes of reviving Mazwi Nature Reserve and thus conserving the area from crime and vice.
- 5.6 The Zimbabwe government consider the long proposed idea of an environmental court to preside over environmental crimes such as deforestation considering the impact of such environmental crimes to the enjoyment of other human rights and freedoms.
- 5.7 The St Peters and other Hyde Park residents be capacitated in environmental civic engagement to empower them to be responsible residents that are actively involved in environmental monitoring and action for the protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms.

6.0 CONCLUSION

MIHR hopes the responsible stakeholders will take action to stop deforestation of the Mazwi Nature Reserve, the Khami River Basin and communities surrounding Khami Prison for the benefit of environmental protection and human rights promotion. MIHR also notes that some Hyde Park and Pumula Residents are complicit in this deforestation as they sell firewood with scotch-carts in the City's suburbs. However, attempts to curb this illegal residents action may be futile if government departments are also involved in deforestation.