

Press-Release

KENYANS VOW TO PROTECT THEIR NATIONAL PARKS

CAK - Thursday 22nd September 2016

The Conservation Alliance of Kenya (CAK) held a press conference to give an important briefing regarding recent events vis-à-vis the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) in Kenya's national parks and reserves.

The CAK represents over 50 NGOs that have invested heavily in the biodiversity conservation, scientific research and community and livelihood development in Kenya. These NGOs represent some of the brightest minds in global conservation, within international and Kenyan institutions such as Nature Kenya, East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS), African Conservation Centre (ACC), Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), Africa Network for Animal Welfare, IUCN, Save the Elephants (STE), African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), among many others.

In response to the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) announcement that they will allow the Standard Gauge Railway to pass through the Nairobi National Park among other parks, the members of Conservation Alliance of Kenya would like to express their concern over the manner in which the decision has been arrived at. Not only is it our constitutional right to be consulted as Kenyan citizens, but it is also for the public's benefit that our counsel forms a basis for national decision making.

The Conservation Alliance of Kenya believes the SGR is an important project in this country that will drive the growth of our economy. We also recognize that our parks are our natural national heritage that we have so proudly protected for many years to our great benefit. Kenya's exemplary environmental governance and conservation efforts are considered best practice globally and have earned us the title of *Conservation Champions!*

Having had our previous engagement with the government fall on deaf ears during SGR I through Tsavo National Park, the membership of the CAK strongly believe it is necessary to make our position known on this issue.

The Conservation Alliance of Kenya has since November last year in 2015 made attempts to engage with Kenya railways Corporation (KRC) and KWS to understand the route options they were considering and offer technical input regarding SGR-Phase 2. Our letters went unanswered but we got verbal assurances that the routes through the park were off the table and they would be making alternative considerations and that we would be fully involved in the process. Follow up letters were written in April 2016 following which the KRC MD Mr. Maina granted CAK a meeting at which we were again re-assured that full engagement of conservation practitioners and Kenyan citizens would be granted before the route was determined.

On August 17th 2016, the Conservation Alliance was invited to the Ministry of Environment offices to listen to a presentation from KRC on SGR Phase 2. To our shock and dismay we realized the route had long been determined and they merely wanted the Alliance to endorse

the decision. They also indicated the project was to be launched soon by His Excellency the President. Out of the 7 options that KRC indicated they had considered, they together with KWS arrived at the decision of the 'Modified Savannah route -4' that cuts right through the middle of the park end to end. We give candid and constructive feedback indicating that there had been no engagement as promised, no information provided on the feasibility studies with the economic, ecological and other arguments that informed the decision. We expressed concern that there was no more time for genuine stakeholder assessment and requested that the decision be deferred till relevant documents were reviewed by stakeholders. Follow up letters to the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Environment, KWS and to KRC requesting all technical documents so that CAK could provide expert opinion have gone un-answered.

The press announcement by KWS Chairman last week, in what seemed to be an ambush approach has left Kenyans wondering if our Parks are really a heritage we are committed to protect.

CAK welcomes the efforts of many Kenyans to save the park and this includes FONNAP, Nairobi Greenline, Kenya Coalition for Wildlife Conservation and Management among others. CAK welcomes the injunction filed by activist Okiyah Omtatah and the Kenya Coalition for Wildlife Conservation and Management on the grounds that work went ahead without conducting environmental and social impact assessment and without receiving the requisite approval from NEMA.

Several issues are what we want to highlight here:

1. The national parks in this country are held in trust by KWS on behalf of Kenyans. The trustee cannot unilaterally decide on the change of use on some parts of the parks without due consultations.
2. The constitution gives us rights as Kenyans to be involved in decisions that affect our heritage especially where there is high risk of irreversible negative impact and the right to have access to the relevant information pertaining to such mega projects. The relevant supporting technical documents have not been shared and the EIA for the project is not yet done, yet the route option has been finalized.
3. The proposed route through the modified savannah greatly compromises the integrity of the park and the migration/movement of some very sensitive species in that park—which among others includes the rhino. Nairobi National Park (NNP) is the only breeding site for the black rhino, has 6 leopard individuals among other key flora and fauna.

The implications of this decision are:

1. **This is a precedence setting decision!**—The manner in which the decision has been made sets a terrible precedence of how Kenya shall surely lose all its parks. Already on-going and proposed development activities at Naivasha Hells gate park, Mt. Kenya, Tsavo national Park, Lake Turkana, etc. are threatening to kill these very parks if there isn't proper planning, engagement and due diligence undertaken. The consideration should not be just for immediate gain but for long term sustainable development. **It seems our parks are not safe!**
2. **Kenyans will lose the value, and valuable income from the park**—The Nairobi National Park is one of Kenya's most iconic parks, among the top-five most visited, the 2nd highest school visits for educational purposes and generating much needed

income for KWS and the country. This benefit too will be lost if we continue undertaking high value projects without proper planning

3. **Kenya's Reputation**—We globally proudly promote Nairobi National Park (NNP) when we host conferences in the city of Nairobi as the only park in the world found within a capital city. In Vision 2030, under the economic pillar, tourism is the key foreign exchange earner! Already the SGR-1 has hived off a portion of the park, the Southern bypass hived off another portion of the park, if SGR-2 proceeds through the park—we will be killing the goose that lays the golden egg!

The conservation alliance of Kenya is working with members, partners, supporters and the Kenyan public to find a way and is keen to offers all support necessary for Kenya to work towards the following way forward. CAK offers the following solutions:

1. CAK advocates for SGR *alongside the park and not through it*. This will give Kenyans the needed economic benefit of the SGR without compromising the parks integrity.
2. There is need to allow for sufficient time for engagement and a thorough assessment of options. Due consideration of the alternative southern option—Route 7 should be given with genuine public participation. The disclosure of all relevant documents is imperative. A team of independent experts in engineering, socio-economic, ecology etc is needed to support the assessment. CAK is willing to work with Government, KWS and KRC to seek out the best options.

In conclusion, Kenya is on a development trajectory and this just one example of the many challenges we will encounter as we try to balance development and conservation. According to the principles of sustainable development and Kenya's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially No. 17, we have an opportunity to undertake development in a manner that will not compromise and cause eternal loss of this great heritage that God has granted this country!

It will not be easy, but we are a *Country of Champions* and we can do it! We ask Kenyans to stand with us on this cause and ensure our actions create wholesome benefit for all. We can have *Our SGR alongside Our Park!*

The CAK is an umbrella body with a membership of over 50 conservation NGOs collectively working to advance the protection and management of biodiversity in Kenya. By putting their expertise into resolving matters to do with land use, national wildlife security, promoting strategic conservation with wise development and representing the country at conventions the Alliance aims to collectively be at the forefront of setting the national agenda in collaboration with the government of Kenya. Thematic areas the Alliance covers include: Conservation and Development, Research and Data Sharing, Wildlife Crime and Communities and Livelihoods.