

## Introduction

I, [Client Name], a citizen of Tanzania and of sound mind, hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the following statements are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief. I submit this declaration in support of my asylum application. I was born on October 15, 1995, in the Ilala District of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I am the son of [Name] and Zawadi John Tegule. Despite their modest means, my parents instilled in me a strong sense of civic responsibility and a deep awareness of the social and political landscape of our country. Furthermore, they were firm believers in the founding principles of Tanzania, particularly *Ujamaa*, a Swahili term that translates to "familyhood" or "brotherhood." This philosophy, championed by our first president, Julius Nyerere, emphasized equality, self-reliance, and communal support as the foundation of our nation. I have two siblings, Khalid Rakhman and Jasmin Nadyia, who both currently reside in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where they lead quiet lives as local traders. Before relocating to the United States, I lived at 510 Street, Kagera, Makulumla, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. My current address in the United States is 1408 Carbine Ln, Saint Charles, MO.

I attended Mbulahati Mianzi High School in Dar es Salaam from 2004 to 2010. While in school, I was outspoken and excelled in extracurricular activities, particularly in the performing arts and drama. I became involved in a local youth acrobatics group, performing street shows that combined entertainment with social awareness. My dedication and passion for acrobatics led to an opportunity with *Hakuna Matata Acrobats*, a renowned group from Dar es Salaam. Through them, I reached the peak of my career, performing in various primary schools across rural villages and traveling throughout the country.

During my travels, I met people from diverse backgrounds who inspired me to embrace activism. This awakening led me to advocate for the Maasai people, who were being forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands for commercial projects. However, my activism soon made me a target of the state and its well-organized machinery of intimidation and repression. In 2020, I was forced to flee my homeland, leaving behind my family and everything I knew.

## The Tipping Point

Like many African nations, Tanzania is endowed with vast natural resources, including rich mineral deposits such as gold, diamonds, tanzanite, iron ore, copper, nickel, cobalt, graphite, and uranium. In addition, the country boasts extensive wildlife reserves, national parks, dense forests, and fertile savannas. However, despite this abundance, a significant portion of the population continues to live in poverty due to systemic corruption, mismanagement, and the exploitation of resources by powerful elites and foreign interests. Among the communities most affected by these exploitative practices is the Maasai, a semi-nomadic pastoralist group residing in northern Tanzania, particularly around the Serengeti National Park, Ngorongoro Crater, and the vast Mara region. For centuries, the Maasai had relied on their ancestral lands for grazing and sustenance, viewing the land not as a commodity but as a fundamental part of their identity and way of life. However, their existence has been increasingly threatened by land seizures, forced evictions, and displacement under the pretext of wildlife conservation and tourism development.

## **A Fateful Encounter That Changed Everything**

A turning point came in 2017 when I was invited to perform at an event where I met Edward Loure, a renowned Maasai activist and Goldman Environmental Prize winner. As an outgoing person, I engaged him in conversation, unaware that this discussion would change my life. He exposed the dark side of tourism, how the influx of big money was fueling the suffering of local communities. I realized that thousands of Maasai families were being forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands to make way for private hunting reserves catering to wealthy elites and international tourists. The government justified these evictions by claiming that the Maasai and their cattle were overburdening conservation areas. In reality, the true beneficiaries were foreign-owned tour companies, private investors, and government brokers profiting at the expense of indigenous communities.

## **Firsthand Encounters with the Displaced**

Following this eye-opening conversation, I could not remain silent. My acrobatics performances took me across rural Tanzania, giving me firsthand exposure to communities that had been forcibly evicted. Families were left homeless, their livestock and their only source of livelihood confiscated or killed. Entire communities had been reduced to extreme poverty, with women and children particularly affected.

Children were unable to attend school, struggling instead to survive in makeshift settlements without access to clean water or food. The Maasai, who had long coexisted with wildlife, now found themselves accused of being a threat to the same ecosystem they had protected for centuries. To them, land is sacred, cattle is their economy, and survival without either is unimaginable.

The few Maasai who dared to speak out faced brutal reprisals. Activists, community leaders, and vocal opponents of the evictions were arrested, detained, or simply disappeared. Fear gripped the Maasai people, but the government's tactics of intimidation did not silence everyone. The injustice I had witnessed ignited a fire within me, compelling me to become an advocate for the displaced.

## **The Sad Reality**

Between 2017 and 2019, the Maasai community in Tanzania endured a series of forced evictions from their ancestral lands, leading to severe human rights violations and widespread displacement. In August 2017, Tanzanian authorities launched a large-scale eviction operation in the Loliondo division of Ngorongoro district, specifically targeting Ololosokwani village on the eastern edge of the Serengeti National Park. During this operation, approximately 185 Maasai homes were destroyed, leaving around 6,800 people homeless. The government justified these actions under the guise of expanding conservation areas and boosting tourism. However, the true

beneficiaries were private businesses and foreign investors, while the indigenous Maasai people suffered immense loss and dispossession.

The forced evictions continued into 2022, with a particularly brutal crackdown on June 10 in Loliondo. Security forces fired live ammunition and tear gas on Maasai residents protesting against land grabs, resulting in injuries and mass displacement. The government's plan to repurpose 1,500 square kilometers of land for conservation and tourism development ignored the rights and livelihoods of the indigenous Maasai, who have lived in the region for generations. Many community members, including activists speaking out against these injustices, faced arbitrary arrests and legal persecution. In addition to forced relocations, there have been reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions of Indigenous Maasai people and activists who criticize the government's development agenda. In 2023, authorities cracked down on peaceful dissent, targeting opposition members, lawyers, and Indigenous leaders.

Beyond the Maasai land crisis, Tanzania has seen a troubling pattern of violence and repression against activists and whistleblowers. One of the most tragic cases was the murder of Wayne Lotter, a renowned wildlife conservationist and anti-poaching activist. Lotter, who co-founded the PAMS Foundation, was gunned down in Dar es Salaam on August 16, 2017. His work focused on combating poaching networks and exposing corruption linked to the illegal ivory trade. Many believe that his assassination was orchestrated by individuals profiting from poaching, as his efforts had led to the prosecution of several high-profile traffickers. His death sent shockwaves through the conservation community and highlighted the dangers faced by those exposing environmental crimes.

Another tragic case is that of Daudi Mwangosi, a Tanzanian journalist who was brutally killed by police on September 2, 2012. Mwangosi was covering a political rally in Nyololo village, Iringa, when he was confronted by security forces. In a shocking display of brutality, police officers fired a tear gas canister at close range, killing him instantly. His death underscored the risks faced by journalists and activists in Tanzania, particularly those reporting on government abuses and opposition activities.

These cases reflect a broader trend of suppression, violence, and legal intimidation against activists, conservationists, journalists, and indigenous leaders in Tanzania. While the government continues to promote policies under the pretext of development and conservation, the reality is that many of these initiatives come at the cost of indigenous land rights, press freedom, and the safety of those daring to speak out. The struggles of the Maasai people, the tragic deaths of Wayne Lotter and Daudi Mwangosi, and the ongoing repression of activists serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need for stronger protections for human rights defenders in Tanzania.

## **The Price of Speaking Out**

In Tanzania, becoming an activist is akin to becoming an enemy of the state. The government has little tolerance for dissent, particularly from those exposing corruption and human rights abuses. Speaking out against injustice often comes with severe consequences: threats, intimidation, arrests, and, in some cases, even forced disappearances.

As my social media presence grew, especially on Facebook, where I had amassed a significant following, my activism began drawing unwanted attention. At first, it was subtle, anonymous phone calls from unknown numbers, warning me to stop what I was doing. Then, the messages became more direct. Through proxy Facebook accounts, I received threats, warning me that if I did not halt my advocacy, I had only myself to blame for what would happen next.

Naïve to the depths of the dangers I faced, I ignored these warnings. I believed that I was just an ordinary individual living in the outskirts of Dar es Salaam, and that I could go unnoticed. I was wrong.

### **A Harrowing Encounter**

One particular Friday evening, after attending prayers at my local mosque, I was walking home when I noticed something unusual. Two men approached me—complete strangers whom I had never seen before. They asked for my name and then, without hesitation, inquired whether I was on the payroll of Tundu Lissu, a well-known opposition leader in Tanzania.

Sensing danger, I refused to engage with them. I neither confirmed nor denied anything. Their tone became more forceful as they claimed to be acting on behalf of their "boss." They left me with three demands:

1. Reveal how much I was being paid.
2. Disclose any meetings I had with Tundu Lissu.
3. Stop criticizing the government's "noble" tourism project.

They even tried to bribe me, offering financial incentives to abandon my stance and support their side. I stood frozen, terrified. Luckily, the men eventually disappeared into the dark alleys of downtown Dar es Salaam as quickly as they had appeared.

At that moment, I knew there was no turning back and that I had to be extremely cautious. Fearing I was being followed, I sought refuge at my friend Juma's house, confiding in him about the encounter and urgently requesting temporary shelter.

## ***Betrayal and Isolation***

The following day, Juma went to work while I stayed hidden in his home. As I scrolled through my phone, trying to piece together why I was being targeted, time seemed to move slowly. When Juma returned in the evening, something was off. Usually a talkative person, he was unusually silent. I asked him what was wrong. At first, he hesitated. Then, after much pressing, he told me plainly that I could no longer stay at his house. “I know you’re a good person,” he said, “but I have a wife and children. I don’t have the means to relocate if anything happens. You are a threat to me and my family.” His words hit me hard. I knew something must have happened to him while he was out. Later, I found out that he too had received threats. That night, I had nowhere to go. Worse still, I received news that my own house had been broken into and ransacked. All my belongings were stolen. I was completely stranded.

With no home, no belongings, and no safe haven, I was forced to live on the streets. To survive, I disguised myself as a street boy, giving up my clean clothes for rags, hiding during the day, and coming out only at night to search for food.

## ***A Dangerous Reality***

Desperate, I remembered a youth center where I had once trained as an acrobat. The center housed homeless youth and street children. I decided to seek shelter there. There, I met my former mentor, who immediately recognized me. After hearing my story, he advised me to consider leaving the country. He spoke of fellow activists who had been murdered for opposing the same human rights abuses I had been exposing.

He reminded me of what had happened to the Maasai community in 2017, when state security forces accompanied by representatives of private tourism companies carried out mass evictions in Loliondo. Over 180 homesteads were burned to the ground, displacing thousands. Just recently, in June of that year, at least 20 people had been arrested and held incommunicado, while hundreds more fled to Kenya, fearing for their lives. Even Tanzanian lawmakers acknowledged the severity of the situation. Emmanuel Ole Shangai, told the media that victims of state brutality were either seeking medical treatment across the border in Kenya or hiding in their homes, too terrified to seek help from local hospitals for fear of being arrested.

## ***Escaping to Safety***

I had no money, no resources, and no safe way to escape the country. Just when I felt trapped, my mentor proposed an idea—applying for a P1 visa, a visa designated for performers. Until then, I had clung to the hope that the situation in Tanzania would stabilize, allowing me to return home. But as time went on, it became painfully clear that things were only getting worse.

From the U.S., I remained committed to advocating for human rights, using online platforms and contributing to news editorials to raise awareness. But the threats never ceased. I began receiving anonymous calls from unknown numbers, warning me that they were still watching—and that I would pay with my life.

Back home, the evictions, human rights abuses, and intimidation tactics continued. Activists who dared to speak out faced even harsher repression. I greatly admire those like human rights lawyer Joseph Oleshangay, who tirelessly fights for the Maasai people in court. Yet, while he pursues justice through legal channels, the government and its proxies resort to extrajudicial measures such as arrests, intimidation, and even assassinations to silence opposition.

One thing is now clear to me: returning to Tanzania is not an option. I fear imprisonment. I fear torture. I fear for my life.

## Conclusion

Humanity has made great strides in upholding human rights and dignity, yet in many African nations, including my homeland of Tanzania, these rights remain fragile and easily stripped away. I firmly believe that everyone has a responsibility to stand against injustice, to use their voice, talents, and actions to create awareness and drive change. Silence in the face of oppression is complicity—I could not stand by and watch my people suffer.

Speaking out put my life in danger, but I have no regrets. My journey began as an acrobat in Tanzania, shaped by the ideals of *Ujamaa*—brotherhood and social responsibility. I discovered that my voice carried power, and when I learned about the forced evictions of the Maasai from their ancestral lands in the Serengeti, Ngorongoro, and the Mara region, I could not look away. That realization transformed me from a performer into an activist.

But my advocacy made me a target. Government persecution forced me to flee to the United States, believing I would find safety. Even in exile, I have continued my fight—raising awareness through online forums, social media campaigns, and working alongside activists like Ngorongoro legislator Emmanuel Ole Shangai, who is pursuing justice through legal avenues. Yet, the Tanzanian government continues its crackdown on dissent, using intimidation, harassment, and extrajudicial violence to silence those who challenge its abuses.

Despite the hardships, I have built a life in the U.S. as an acrobat, but my heart remains with those still suffering back home. I long to see justice for my people, and I hope my efforts contribute to the change we desperately need. However, returning to Tanzania would put my life in immediate danger. I have already faced threats, surveillance, and persecution for speaking out. If I were to return, I would likely be arrested, tortured, or even killed.

For these reasons, I seek asylum in the United States, not merely as a place of refuge, but as a sanctuary where I can continue my advocacy without fear. Granting me asylum would not only protect my life but also allow me to keep shining a light on the struggles of the marginalized in Tanzania. I believe in a future where justice prevails, and I am committed to being part of the movement that makes that future a reality.

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