

# **Submission of the Ramunangi Clan to the Portfolio Committee on Land Reform and Rural Development**

**Presented on behalf of the Ramunangi Clan by**

**Mr Johannes Ramutangwa and Mrs Tshavhungwe Nemarude at the Parliamentary Hearings into the Repeal of the Black Authorities Act held on 20 and 21 July 2010.**

---

The Ramunangi have been custodians of the Ramunangi Guvhukuvhu and Nwadzongolo sacred sites in Limpopo since the time when the first people came to that place. We were given custody of the sacred sites by God. This was before the time of the division between South Africa and Zimbabwe. We are Vhadau Vhangona, part of the Mapongupwe. The Tshivhase chiefs found us there and conquered us. We accepted their authority, and for all this time they have respected the Ramunangi's custody of the sacred sites. When the Venda nation needed rain they would ask the Ramunangis to talk to the ancestors at the sacred site. This happened even with the predecessor of the current Headman. The Nwadzongolo site was destroyed in 2006, when a road was built. Now the Guvhukuvhu site is under threat. Let us explain.

The site is comprised of the natural place, the river and waterfall where our ancestors are residing. It is also important for animals, birds and snakes, which are not supposed to be killed. Firewood is not supposed to be collected. At this site you will find big stone pots, which were made by the ancestors, in which water from the waterfall is collected. Every year, in September, the Ramunangi perform rituals at the sacred site. At the end of the rituals the place makes a sound – *guvhukuvhu* – to tell the Venda that the rain is coming.

People respected the site in the past. The chiefs and headmen respected the site. All were afraid and they were respectful of the site. There was no road, only a small path used by the Ramunangis who were going to do rituals. Now there is a road and the forest is being destroyed.

In 2001, Headman Jerry Tshivhase turned the sacred site into a picnic place from which he receives the entrance fees as income. The Ramunangi were not consulted. When we came to the gate the security guards demanded payment from us before we could enter. We refused to pay and continued onto the site to perform our rituals. At the site we found used

condoms and empty bottles of alcohol. Also, other people who visit the site to picnic had access to the place where we were performing our rituals. This is taboo.

After we performed the rituals in 2001 we went to the Headman, Jerry Tshivhase, to complain that the site was being desecrated. Headman Jerry Tshivhase told us that the site belongs to the Tshivhase, not the Ramunangi. He wrote a letter that we should take to the Chief, but when we read the letter it said only that the civic people and the Ramunangi should be brought to a meeting. The Ramunangi feel that this is a matter between them, as custodians, and the Headman, as traditional authority, and that they have no business with the civic.

The Ramunangi went to see Headman Jerry Tshivhase many times without resolution. Because the Tshivhase's are chiefs we didn't know what to do. We continued to do the rituals in September every year. Finally, in 2005 we decided to go to Chief Kennedy Tshivhase. We found the traditional councillors there and we gave them a letter for the Chief. They said they would give it to the chief. We didn't receive a response for a long time, so we gave more letters to the councillors. They said they would call us. Finally, a councillor told us that the site doesn't belong to the Ramunangi – it belongs to Tshivhase. We also went to various different government departments, including land and traditional affairs, but we received no help from them.

In June 2010 we discovered that bulldozers were digging up our sacred site. There they were making new roads, and building 6 chalets for which the foundations are in. This is the first time that we knew anything about tourism development at the sacred site. Nobody consulted the Ramunangi at any time. It seems that the Tshivhase were given permission to build without any consultation or investigations being conducted into the site.

Since they started to destroy the site many members of the Ramunangi Clan are sick and some have even died. We believe that this is because we are no longer protecting the sacred site as we should be. Our ancestors are angry with us for this reason.

We have now decided to go to court. On 9 July 2010 we obtained a court order to stop the desecration of the site for 20 days. The Ramunangi do not want authority over the site. We respect the leadership of the Tshivhase. But we are the custodians, since the beginning of time. Our responsibility for the land and our duty to the ancestors must be recognised. We

have to make sure that the place is respected. This means that it must be restored to its natural status, the trees replanted, and the road and the foundations removed.

The Black Authorities Act created tribal authorities that gave all powers to the chiefs. It disregarded individuals, families and clans living in the same area and having particular rights over the same land, like the Ramunangi Clan. We support the repeal of the Act. But Parliament must ensure that traditional authorities are not again given absolute power over our land. They must have control over land for *specific* purposes, just as the Ramunangi's rights for a specific purpose needs to be recognised and respected. This means that when the government is required to consult with people whose rights are affected, it must go beyond the tribal office to fulfil its obligation. Chiefs are not chiefs by themselves. They are chiefs because of the presence of their subjects. *Khosi, ndi Khosi nga vhalanda.*

---