

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

## "There is No Time Left"

Climate Change, Environmental Threats, and Human Rights in Turkana County, Kenya

# TURKANA

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The population of Turkana County is predominately indigenous Turkana people, who mainly rely on livestock herding or fishing in Lake Turkana for their livelihood.

Turkana County and the eastern shores of Lake Turkana is globally renowned as the cradle of mankind: archeologists have found the oldest ancestors to modern humans in the region. However, today, Turkana County is home to a rapidly growing population that is among the poorest in Kenya and is facing increasing difficulty in accessing water, food, health and security. The County has long experienced periods of cyclical drought, but new climate patterns, combined with threats to Lake Turkana from hydroelectric and irrigation projects in Ethiopia, present immediate and long-term dangers to the lake and to the growing number of people who depend on it for survival.

#### **RIGHT TO FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD:** FISHING



"I came to the lake because my animals had all died....How will I survive when my animals have died and the lake has disappeared? How will I survive when the drought sweeps me away and sends me to my grave?"

— Elderly pastoralist living near Lake Turkana

These villagers rely on natural resources for food and livelihood, which makes them especially vulnerable to any changes in the environment. About 90 percent of the water in LakeTurkana comes from Ethiopia's Omo River.

Major industrial developments are underway in Ethiopia's Omo River valley, which are predicted to dramatically reduce the water supply of the lake devastating the fishery.

Villagers catch fish on the shores of Lake Turkana, Kenya.

#### RIGHT TO FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD: FISHING



During times of drought, Turkana pastoralists migrate to the shores of Lake Turkana to fish in order to earn income to replenish their diminishing herds. With increasing drought and climate change, the threatened demise of Lake Turkana's fishery will have a devastating ability on the ability of pastoralists to sustain their livelihoods through the replenishment of their herds.

Fish drying in Longech village on the shores of Lake Turkana.

### RIGHT TO FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD: FISHING

Kenya's response to the potential disappearance of the Lake Turkana fishery and the livelihoods of 300,000 Kenyans has been largely one of indifference. In 2012, the Kenyan government signed a deal to import electricity from Ethiopia, much of which will be produced from the Gibe III dam on the Omo River.



#### **RIGHT TO FOOD AND VELIHOOD:** HERDING

Internally displaced villagers herd livestock in Turkana County.

Cattle herding is a main livelihood strategy of many indigenous Turkana and a source of food, pride and wealth. While Turkana has always been dry, longer periods of drought is resulting in decreasing grazing land, less resilient animals and greatly diminished herds.

"The famine has displaced people. The herd boys who were looking after the livestock have lost everything, now they have nothing to do. We have no choice but to put our hands up and ask for help. Where will we go now? It is death that awaits us."

- Pastoralist

## RIGHT TO FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD: HERDING

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– Pastoralist O.L., September 2014



#### **RIGHT TO WATER**



Girls from Kalokol Girls Primary school, Turkana County.

"During this dry season I go often [to the river] not just once a day, but morning and then later in the evening, and tomorrow again the same thing. The whole village depends on this river alone, both the human and the livestock. Sometime back, when the rain was enough the water [from rains] could last for even four months [in the adjacent river]. But now things have changed, as the wells dry very fast."

PASTORALIST WOMAN, 9-MONTHS PREGNANT,
WHO WALKS 18 KILOMETERS A DAY FOR WATER

Girls from the Kalokol Girls Primary School fetch water from a dry riverbed to carry back to their school, which does not have access to running water. Nearby Lake Turkana is too saline for human consumption. Women and girls often walk extremely long distances to dig for water in dry riverbeds, exposing them to physical danger and taking time away from their studies. As climate variability increases, women are having to walk further and dig deeper to access potable water. "Truthfully, health cases increase daily. For instance, we had drought so the children were hungry and this hurt them. When it rained, there was the problem of mosquitoes because mosquitoes spread malaria. There is the problem of the river. The water that came recently, when the children drink from it, their chest problems increase. Problems increase every season."

— Teacher at Kalokal school



#### **RIGHT TO WATER**

"The drought has been affecting both people and animals in recent years. Another one of my children became sick during the previous drought period, and died due to starvation and sickness. We starve during the drought and when the government comes, it helps only a few people."

– Woman with children

Maternal mortality in Turkana is three times the national average. Turkana has had a long history of chronic malnutrition and some of the poorest health indicators in Kenya, with minimal health investment and infrastructure, staff, and services for its largely mobile pastoralist population, all of which is exacerbated by a growing population. Diseases that are waterborne, or relate to poor sanitation stemming from lack of water, are likely to be influenced by climate change, increasing risks of cholera and typhoid outbreaks and greater rates of diarrhea and trachoma.



### **RIGHT TO HEALTH**

Parents and health workers cite a wide range of illness in the community, including diarrhea, malaria, and chronic malnutrition. With only one underresourced health clinic serving a geographically dispersed population, parents and children have to walk long distances to receive health care.



#### **RIGHT TO HEALTH**

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Due to increasing temperatures and unpredictable rainfall, many children become sick because their families are unable to provide them with sufficient food and safe water. Community members routinely cite hunger and malnutrition as among the most severe challenges they face. Violence between different ethnic groups over access to scarce resources, including grazing land and water has always been present in Turkana County. But the patterns of violence are becoming more frequent and deadly as population growth, displacement from industrial development in Ethiopia, and increased climate variability is further reducing available grazing land and water resources in Turkana.



Internally displaced villagers carry firearms while guarding livestock near Lowarengak in Turkana County.

#### **RIGHT TO SECURITY**



Dry earth with footprints in a section near the shores of Lake Turkana.

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#### "There is No Time Left"

#### Climate Change, Environmental Threats, and Human Rights in Turkana County, Kenya

Climate change, in conjunction with a rising population and large-scale development projects in Ethiopia, are undermining the ability of Kenya's indigenous Turkana people to access water, food, health and security.

*"There is No Time Left"*, based on research and interviews conducted with pastoralists in Turkana County, Kenya, highlights the increased burden facing the government of Kenya, and other governments, to progressively realize human rights amidst rising temperatures and increasing extreme weather events.

The report describes how climate change has placed pressure on water resources, resulting in less dry season grazing land and diminished livestock herds, while hydroelectric projects and irrigated sugar plantations in Ethiopia's lower Omo river valley threaten to vastly reduce the water levels in Lake Turkana. As a result, Turkana pastoralists told Human Rights Watch that every day was a struggle for survival for people and their livestock. Women and girls interviewed said that they often had to spend more time walking longer distances to dig for water in dry riverbeds. Parents said that their children become sick because their families are unable to provide them with sufficient food and safe water for drinking and hygiene. Turkana fisherfolk feared that diminished water levels would decimate fish stocks, and the source of livelihood for 300,000 Turkana residents.

Human Rights Watch calls on the government of Kenya to develop climate change policies that protect the basic rights of the most marginalized populations. The struggles of the Turkana people are also a reminder for governments in the region and around the world to ensure that human rights becomes a central element of future climate change policies and agreements.



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Pastoralist woman forced off her community's land from increasing competition over grazing areas and cattle, in Lowarengak, Turkana County.

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