Press Release 03/2026
26 October 2026

OvaHimba and OvaTjimba leaders call for suspension of Baynes dam activities pending an inclusive consultation process

Windhoek, Namibia – Today, a delegation of OvaHimba and OvaTjimba community leaders handed over a petition to Namibia's Minister of Industries, Mines and Energy, Hon Modestus Amutse, calling on the Namibian and Angolan Governments and the Lower Cunene Hydropower Authority (LCHA) to suspend all activities related to the proposed Baynes Hydropower Project until a transparent and inclusive consultation process has been conducted. The petition is also being sent to both governments, the LCHA, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and relevant United Nations Special Rapporteurs.

It carries 2,011 signatures from OvaHimba and OvaTjimba people in Namibia and Angola. Additionally, over 500 people and institutions have expressed support online in solidarity with communities along the Kunene River.

Communities demand a say in decisions affecting their land
The petitioners say they have not been adequately informed or meaningfully consulted and have not given their consent to the Baynes dam project. They warn that the dam threatens their ancestral land, graves and sacred sites, as well as the grazing areas and water sources on which their pastoral livelihoods depend.

"The Kunene River and our ancestral land sustain our livelihoods, culture and identity. Baynes activities must stop until there is a genuine process that respects our rights and our own ways of making decisions," said delegation member Kaujorua Tjambiru Hembunga.

The delegation included:
Ombuku Kapika Traditional Authority
1. Mr. Mutaambanda Kapika -Chief
2.Mr. Uemupiana Gabriel Kapika -Chairperson
3.Mr. Motjinduika Mutambo Kapika- Senior Councillor
4. Mr. Muniovimoha Muniombara- Headman of Epupa and Orokaue
Tjizapundu Traditional Authority - (Ovatjimba Community of Omavanda)
1. Mr. Kaujorua Tjambiru Hembunga - Community member
2.Mr. Uerisora Harire - Community member
3. Mrs. Uazirua Ngumbi- Community member

The signatories reject the suggestion that engagement through the Kunene North Traditional Leaders Forum constitutes consultation with their communities, stating that the forum does

not represent them. They also say that meetings reportedly held in 2009 and 2011 cannot substitute for a transparent and inclusive process concerning the current project in 2026.

“We have our own representatives, customary laws and ways of making decisions. Engagement with a forum that does not represent us cannot be treated as our consent. The governments and financiers must respect our Biocultural Community Protocol and engage directly with us before advancing a project that threatens our land, ancestral graves and grazing areas,” said Chief Mutaambanda Kapika of the Ombuku Kapika Traditional Authority.

Background to the editor: What the petition calls for
Baynes is a proposed joint hydropower development on the Lower Kunene River, comprising main and regulating dams, roads and transmission lines.

The petition recognises the need for sustainable energy development and calls for rigorous assessment of less destructive alternatives. In addition to calling for the suspension of project activities pending an inclusive consultation process, the petition calls for:

1. Disclosure of project documents, including feasibility studies, impact assessments and agreements, in accessible formats and languages, including OtjiHerero.
2. Recognition of the OvaHimba Biocultural Community Protocol and protection of customary land rights.
3. Assessment of sustainable energy alternatives, including solar and wind power.
4. Independent assessments of human rights and environmental, social and health risks of the project.

Attached: Petition text and images: 1) Chief Mutaambanda Kapika handing over petition and attached documents, 2) Chief Mutaambanda Kapika and Hon Modestus Amutse, Minister of Industries, Mines and Energy, greetings each other, 3) Hon Minister Amutse going through the petition documents.
High Res images can also be send, upon request.

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