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DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA

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EU suspends its support for Water Towers in view of reported human rights abuses

European Union Ambassador condemns the killing of a member of the Sengwer community and underlines that both indigenous people's rights and Kenya's water towers need protection

Today, the European Union Ambassador to Kenya Stefano A. Dejak condemned the reported killing of a member of the Sengwer community and shooting of another by *Kenyan Forest Service* guards yesterday in Kapkok Glade.

"Yesterday's shooting took place after we had formally alerted Kenya's Government that the use of force by Kenya Forest Service guards in the Embobut Forest or elsewhere against innocent locals would lead the EU to suspend its financial support for conservation work on the country's water towers," noted Ambassador Dejak. "Accordingly, we are now suspending the support to the Water Towers Programme with the Government of Kenya."

The EU-funded programme is the Water Towers Protection and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Programme. This seeks to protect the ground supplies of water, which are known as water towers, in the Mount Elgon and the Cherangani Hills areas of Kenya. The water towers store rainwater, enable regular river flows, recharge ground-water storage, improve soil fertility, reduce erosion and sediment in river water, and host a diverse species of plants and animals. Launched in June 2016, the programme has provided technical support and funding to the national government, counties and several government agencies.

The EU insists on full respect for the rights of indigenous people, and the conservation work on the water towers was never expected to involve any evictions or use of violence. EU staff have been following up on reports which began more than a year ago concerning abuses of indigenous people's rights in the conservation areas, as there were claims that these were linked to the EU's support. A new wave of evictions of Sengwer people from the Embobut Forest was reported last month, leading quickly to intense discussions between the EU Delegation and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. On 10 January Amb. Dejak joined the Cabinet Secretary, Prof. Judi Wakhungu and four County Governors hosted by Gov. Tolgos of Elgeyo Marakwet in a meeting arranged with all stakeholders in Eldoret: CS Wakhungu and Amb. Dejak agreed on follow-up actions, including on the need for an

independent investigation of the recent reports of evictions, while Gov. Tolgos endeavoured to engage immediately on a targeted County dialogue.

On 15 January the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported on its website that three UN Special Rapporteurs had expressed concerns about the recent reports of evictions of Sengwer inhabitants, and that they had urged the EU to suspend its funding for the conservation work. In view of yesterday's reported use of lethal violence, the European Commission is suspending today the EU's support to the government under the Water Towers Programme. The Commission and the EU Delegation to Kenya aim to continue to work closely with the Government as well as with County Governors and other concerned Authorities to ensure a full respect of the rights of indigenous peoples in the water towers areas and will engage to bring forward the agreed means of local consultations, dialogue and investigations to ensure that this will be the case.

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