

Open Letter to

Hon William Lukuvi

Minister of Lands And Human Settlements

And

Hon January Makamba

Minister in the Office of the Vice President, Environment and Union affairs

Dear Hon Ministers,

Re: The 60 Meter Exclusion Zone Rule is Outdated and Impractical For Our Cities

It is with much respect and forbearance that I address you both through the media by way of an open letter today.

I am doing so because of the public nature of the matter I wish to bring to your attention and also in the hope that other members of the public may have many useful contributions to add to the conversation.

The issue at hand has to do with the ongoing and planned nationwide demolition of structures and buildings that have allegedly been constructed illegally.

As a law abiding and progressive citizen, I understand and wholeheartedly support the general principle behind this difficult yet necessary initiative. I also support the demolition of all structures that have been condemned as being unsafe or have been built in blatant defiance or violation of clear orders from authorities not to proceed. I support the removal by demolition or other means, of all structures that have been built on planned open spaces or public land such as road reserves.

However, I have serious difficulties with the irrational manner in which the demolition exercise is being carried out and in particular, I am troubled by the absence of a clear logic on what problem exactly this exercise is intended to solve and if so how sustainable the outcome will be. Specifically, I have serious doubts about demolition plans that are specifically targeting structures that have been built on land that is termed by city and environmental officials as **river/beach reserves** within large cities such as Dar es salaam, Arusha, Mwanza, Mbeya, etc.

Dar es Salaam for example is a city of 5 million people today and is growing at a very fast pace, projected to be one of the world's most populous cities with a population of well over 8.5 million by the year 2032 according to statistics released by the Government three years ago. The population of this city has grown 20 times between 1965 and 2015 from roughly 250,000 to 5 million residents. This equates to an average annual city population growth rate of 6%, twice the national population growth.

Hon Ministers,

You are no doubt aware that the abolition of LGAs between 1972 -1984 by the Government meant that the city of Dar es Salaam experienced tremendous population growth while no one was bearing a clear mandate for city master plans. Worse still, there was no funding during this period for projects that were proposed in earlier master plans published in 1968 and 1979.

I have read a 2013 document sponsored by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development titled "**Dar es Salaam Masterplan 2012-2032**" that makes a number of excellent recommendations that if implemented in a timely manner could have helped improve the quality of life in this city. The problem however is that the version I read is a draft and I am not sure it was finalised or any part if it implemented. By the look of things it was not, because one key recommendation in that document is the involvement of the city residents in the approval and subsequent implementation of the plan and its numerous projects.

Today, the city is what it is because of a colossal failure by government, not as a result of a failure on the part of or conspiracy by city residents. It goes without saying therefore that it would be manifestly unfair for the Government to force 5 million people to live according to a city masterplan that for all intents and purposes is nonexistent.

It may well be possible that the Government is indeed working off some plan that has not been made public and as such is justified in carrying out these demolitions under the prevailing legal dispensation. This however does not in any way provide an excuse for moving ahead with such destructive and irreversible action without pausing to reflect if we have covered all our bases. If we don't do that and specifically, if the city residents do not understand and buy into the concept for the sake of their own development, this project promises to be an even worse failure than living without an operational city masterplan for fifty years.

Sustainable Protection of River Reserves in our Cities

A significant number of demolitions is earmarked to take place in areas where residents are accused of having encroached on so called river reserves. Although these so called protected areas are not defined according to any document available to the public, Municipal and ministry officials are demanding that a minimum of 60 meters be reserved on both sides of waterways that pass through our cities. This is being done in a very arbitrary manner. Worse

still no distinction is made between natural rivers such as Msimbazi and seasonal streams such as Mbezi.

Quite a big fuss has been made of the frequent floods in our cities as the main reason behind the most recent Government action. However, while flooding affects the central business district of Dar es Salaam just as badly, city and ministry officials choose only to react to flooding in the Msimbazi and Jangwani valleys while turning a blind eye to such flooding hot spots as Bibi Titi Road near the Morogoro Rd crossing, Ohio Street near ATC House and Works Ministry headquarters at Holland House, Ocean Road, Ghana Avenue and others where flooding can occur after hardly five minutes of rain.

Now we know that most of the flooding in the CBD is caused by the blocked storm water drainage system that has not been expanded to match the needs of a fast growing metropolis over the years. And the flooding in the Jangwani valley is not so much caused by the valley residents as it is by the millions of tones of garbage that are thrown into the river by residents miles away upstream of the Msimbazi. When the government insists that this problem will be solved merely by relocating the Jangwani Valley residents to other places, it gives rise to the growing suspicion amongst the population that the exercise is not based on a correct and thorough analysis of the causes and its outcome may therefore not be sustainable even in the near term.

Hon Ministers,

Throughout human history, progressive societies have never ran away from water. Instead they create resilient pathways for water to pass safely on its way to the oceans. They fortify beachfronts with levees if necessary and create breathing channels for the oceans to make sure that humans can go to bed without fear of being drowned by swelling seas in the middle of the night.

They strengthen the river banks and dredge the river beds to make them deeper (not wider). They build dams to catch the flood waters upstream and to reduce the speed of water as it flows down on its way to larger, lower lying natural water bodies.

In other words, instead of running away from the water or demolishing expensive properties, they put their engineers, technician, environmental scientists and city planners to work and make sure they find sustainable solutions for the future wellbeing of their cities and people. It goes without saying that if you run away, the water will always follow and eventually catch up with you.

The 60m prescribed in our regulations is therefore neither sensible nor appropriate especially in a city planning context in this time and age.

We all know very well that left to their own devices, the waters of the Msimbazi river and the Mlalakuwa and Mbezi seasonal streams that cross the city on their way to the Indian Ocean will get bigger and faster, not smaller and slower.

This is because the highlands surrounding DAR (Makongo, Boko/Goba, Mbezi Juu, Pugu, even Mabwepande) are being built up at a fast rate and the floods we have been experiencing in DAR that are getting worse every year are driven by these new developments

Over the past thirty years, the courses of these rivers and streams have moved by as much as 50-100 meters in some places from their original locations due to natural human developments including public structures such as roads, bridges and water pipelines, shifting the so called river reserves in the process, turning previously safe structures into illegal ones and previously livable areas into death traps.

The same goes for the seasonal stream that wreaks havoc in Mwanza city every year and I am sure Arusha will soon face the same problem if we continue down this path.

Hon Ministers,

If The Netherlands followed the 60m rule there would be no Amsterdam or Rotterdam today because that entire country is below sea level.

In the UK, The Thames River crosses through the city of London but far from keeping it 60 meters away (which is technically impossible anyway), Londoners have constructed beautiful structures above it, alongside it and even underneath it. We too can do the same.

In Amsterdam and Cape Town, man lives within touching distance of the sea and it is good that way. We too can do the same and indeed have done so most of our lives.

Not so many years ago, we had beautiful beach hotel villages in the north of Dar called Africana, Kunduchi Beach and Bahari Beach that were eaten up by the Indian Ocean under our helpless gaze

Recent innovative developments and land reclamations by entrepreneurs however have reclaimed those beaches, made the environment in those areas resilient and habitable again. If we had maintained the 60 meter rule, the Indian Ocean would be lurking within meters of the Bahari Beach road, if not today then very soon.

It follows then that in a city where millions live and go about their daily business, in a city where the population will continue to rise at a high rate, the 60 meter rule is an antiquated idea that is not backed up by any science and if applied unreasonably as is currently the case, it will lead to unnecessary destruction and loss of valuable real estate. It will disrupt lives and cause discontent. What is more, far from solving the flooding problem, it will make it worse.

The point I am trying to make here is that God gave man brains so that he may be able to tame nature to his own advantage, to support his own survival, not to run from water, heat or cold.

No reasonable person can dispute the fact that our city planners have been sleeping on the job for decades. The city of DAR Es Salaam is now size XXL but they (officials) are trying to force it into a size XXS city master plan that they have been sitting on for decades without any thought of enforcing or improving. This is not acceptable

We deserve better and can do better.

Hon Ministers,

I know you have a job to do and in this era of Hapa Kazi Tu, you don't have much time to get it done.

While I totally understand the urgency, I respectfully ask you to allow the residents of these cities and their government to have an open debate on their city masterplans as civilized societies do.

Let us have this debate for the sake of progress and for the sake of future generations of Tanzanians.

Let's agree on how we want to manage our cities, where we want to build what, how high, how wide and in what ways, in other words let us agree on new zoning regulations, new building specifications, new rules that are fit for modern living in the 21st century.

Let's agree on open spaces locations, land uses, water pathways and most importantly, let's be diligent in enforcing city planning regulations once agreed.

And while some people may derive a perverse kind of satisfaction from driving giant bulldozers into city neighborhoods and knocking down structures they claim have been built without permission, we shouldn't forget these structures were not built overnight.

Where was the government when all this happened?

Who was holding what office presiding over this mess and what has been done to hold each and everyone of these government officials accountable?

This problem is as old as Tanzania itself meaning that if we go back to looking for all who are responsible for this mess we won't have time for anything else.

Going back to my central point, let's build Dar es Salaam and other cities based on future proof master plans, not some arbitrary decrees that officials come up with after every rainy season. And let those plans fit our current and future needs, not the other way round.

Some valuable structures that are earmarked for demolition today now can be accommodated in new, innovative and forward looking master plans and that way we can avoid costly and unnecessary destruction of value.

New, innovative and enforceable environmental regulations as well as smart application of engineering and neighbourhood architecture can make it possible for valley residents to continue living their lives without unnecessary disruptions. Rivers that are coursing through residential areas can be rerouted to the sea by innovative engineering and sustainable management of the environment.

We shouldn't forget these cities belong to all of us, the rich and not so rich.

And finally, the silly 60m rule can be consigned to the archives of ancient colonial history where it belongs

Yours sincerely

Ali A. Mufuruki

Dar es Salaam Resident