

# Places of death

*Gana fight to retain land in Botswana*

THE two Gana men never imagined they would find themselves on other continents thousands of kilometres away from their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in southern Africa. But the fight to save their homelands and their people recently led Roy Sesana and Jumanda Gakelebone to the US, Britain and Norway.

They want the world to know of the Botswana Government's brutal eviction of the Gana and Gwi (traditionally known as 'Bushmen') from the ancestral lands they have inhabited for more than 20,000 years. Forced into grim resettlement camps they call 'places of death', about 2,500 Gana and Gwi and the neighbouring Bakgalagadi are struggling to survive.

'We are dying now in the resettlement camps,' Roy Sesana, an elder and shaman, said during his visit to London. 'We depended on what is on our land and we managed to survive. We know that land. We know where our ancestors are. Now we've been pushed into the hands of the Government.' This Government, they say, has used torture and intimidation, has banned hunting and gathering, and has shut off water supplies in order to expel them.

But these indigenous peoples are fighting back against the Government and the forcible relocations they suffered in 1997 and 2002. They formed an organization to protect their rights, the First Peoples of the Kalahari - currently chaired by Roy Sesana - and took the Government to court. 'We have human rights,' says Sesana. 'We are people. We have to be respected. No matter what kind of development, it has to be discussed with us.'

Roy Sesana and Jumanda Gakelebone say that it is no coincidence that the forced removals coincided with diamond prospecting in the area. The vast grasslands of the Kalahari - the home and hunting grounds of the Gana and Gwi - contain diamond deposits in a country renowned as one of the world's leading diamond producers. 'We have been evicted for mining concessions and tourism,' Roy Sesana explains.

The court case reconvened in November after being adjourned last July. The Gana and Gwi have appealed for international support in their efforts to return to their ancestral land.

'There is no democracy for us,' says Roy Sesana. 'If there were democracy in Botswana, there would be no need for me to sit here today and ask for your help.'

Their hopes of returning to the Kalahari now rest on the legal challenge. 'If we lose this case,' says Roy Sesana, 'it will be the end of Bushmen and the end of the Bushman culture.'

**Rosemary J Brown**