# African Parks admits human rights abuses by rangers amid scrutiny of Prince Harry’s role



A significant shift in the narrative surrounding conservation efforts in the Republic of the Congo has emerged following the admission of human rights abuses by rangers associated with African Parks, a charity linked to Prince Harry. The report, which surfaced after allegations made in the *Mail on Sunday*, reveals a troubling timeline of abuse, including torture, forced displacement, and sexual violence against the Indigenous Baka people living near the Odzala-Kokoua National Park.

The charity's acknowledgment came after an internal investigation, which pointed to systematic misconduct by eco-guards funded and managed by African Parks. The revelation is alarming, especially given that this organisation, which has been involved in various conservation efforts across Africa, is under Prince Harry's directorship. While the investigation is still ongoing, African Parks has maintained that no evidence suggests the Duke of Sussex had prior knowledge of these abuses during his tenure as president or subsequently as a board member.

The inquiries into these practices trace back as far as 2013, illustrating a long-standing issue within the realm of conservation that has often been overshadowed by the imperative of environmental protection. Critics of African Parks, including representatives from Survival International, have pointed out that the atmosphere of violence perpetuated by park rangers is not an isolated incident but rather a reflection of a larger pattern in conservation movements that often neglect the rights and needs of local communities. Fiore Longo, head of Survival International’s conservation campaign, articulated this perspective when she explained that increased violence against local populations began particularly after 2010 when African Parks intensified its management practices.

The implications of these allegations are profound, raising questions about the ethical foundations of park management practices that prioritise biodiversity over the rights of Indigenous peoples. Many locals who have historically relied on these lands for sustenance now find themselves restricted and, in some cases, violently oppressed for seeking access to what has long been their home. According to accounts from individuals in affected communities, the situation has deteriorated significantly since the establishment of the national park, with reports of physical abuse and sexual violence becoming alarmingly commonplace.

African Parks has stated that it operates under a 'zero-tolerance' policy regarding any form of abuse and claims to be committed to the rights of local populations. However, the ongoing investigation and the call for greater transparency reflect scepticism from advocacy groups. The charity asserts that it has made several attempts to engage with Survival International to gather further evidence but has expressed frustration over their lack of cooperation.

The controversy surrounding African Parks prompts a re-evaluation of conservation strategies, particularly how they intersect with human rights. As conservation organisations like African Parks seek to expand their influence—ambitiously aiming to manage 30 parks—stakeholders and the public alike are pressed to consider the cost of these endeavours on local communities. Critics argue that the 'fortress conservation' model—which often involves the militarisation of parks and the displacement of Indigenous people—must be scrutinised and reformed to prevent further abuses.

With calls for Prince Harry to distance himself from an organisation implicated in such grave allegations, the dialogue around ethical conservation continues to unfold. The resolution of these issues will require not just internal reform within African Parks but also a broader cultural shift in how conservation is practiced globally. As the scrutiny intensifies, the urgent need for a more inclusive approach to conservation—one that respects the rights of Indigenous populations and seeks their involvement—has never been clearer.

### Reference Map

1. Article [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/2052738/prince-harry-linked-charity-admits-human-rights-abuses)
2. Article [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/ad2e5100039dd3938e3d20790b6628d2)
3. Article [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/851f96d4-1c3d-45b8-9502-a0f8fed5f719)
4. Article [[4]](https://www.africanparks.org/statement-board-and-ceo-african-parks-regarding-allegations-human-rights-abuses-rangers-odzala)
5. Article [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/28/charity-with-prince-harry-as-director-investigated-over-and-torture-claims)
6. Article [[6]](https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/13870)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/2052738/prince-harry-linked-charity-admits-human-rights-abuses> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/ad2e5100039dd3938e3d20790b6628d2> - An internal investigation by African Parks, a South African-based wildlife parks consortium, has confirmed incidents of human rights abuses committed by rangers at the Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the Republic of the Congo. The park, associated with Prince Harry, sits on land once inhabited by Indigenous peoples, many of whom were forcibly displaced during its creation. The abuses—including torture, rape, and forced displacement—were reportedly carried out by rangers managed and funded by African Parks. These findings follow earlier reports by Survival International, a human rights group, which alleged that such abuse had been known since at least 2013. Though African Parks has expressed regret and acknowledged the suffering, the final report from the investigation remains confidential, and key details are unclear. African Parks operates by managing the daily affairs of protected wildlife areas on behalf of partner countries, who maintain policy oversight. The organization is known for improving park operations in nations grappling with poverty, corruption, and instability.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/851f96d4-1c3d-45b8-9502-a0f8fed5f719> - Abdelkerim Brahim recounts the day his father and four others were killed by Janjaweed poachers while on patrol in Zakouma National Park, Chad. Determined to continue his father's legacy, Brahim becomes a ranger to protect Chad's last remaining herd of elephants. African Parks, a South African NGO, took over Zakouma in 2010, bringing professional management and new security measures, leading to a significant reduction in poaching. Today, Zakouma has around 1,000 elephants, with newborn calves seen frequently. Peter Fearnhead, CEO of African Parks, aims to expand their management to 30 parks and form 'megalandscapes' across Africa. Despite success in conservation, African Parks faces criticism for its so-called 'fortress conservation' approach, accused of sidelining local communities. Incidents of violence by rangers and accusations of land-grabbing have raised concerns. Fearnhead maintains that strict measures and sometimes contentious decisions are necessary to protect wildlife from poachers. The conflict highlights the broader debate between traditional conservation methods and respecting indigenous rights.
4. <https://www.africanparks.org/statement-board-and-ceo-african-parks-regarding-allegations-human-rights-abuses-rangers-odzala> - African Parks has a zero-tolerance policy for any form of abuse and is committed to upholding the rights of local and indigenous people. Allegations of misconduct are thoroughly investigated and acted on, and all of our parks are managed with a central philosophy of awareness, sensitivity and commitment to upholding the rights of local people. We are aware of the serious allegations regarding human rights abuses by eco-guards against local people living adjacent to Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the Republic of Congo, which have recently received media attention. We became aware of these allegations last year via a Board Member who received a letter from Survival International. We immediately launched an investigation through an external law firm based on the information we had available, while also urging Survival International to provide any and all facts they had. It’s unfortunate that they have chosen not to cooperate, despite repeated requests, and we continue to ask for their assistance. This is an active, ongoing investigation that is our highest priority as an organisation, and we encourage anyone with knowledge of any abuses to report them to us or to the Congolese law enforcement authorities which will assist with the investigation and ensure that the perpetrators of any abuses are brought to justice.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/28/charity-with-prince-harry-as-director-investigated-over-and-torture-claims> - A wildlife charity that has the Duke of Sussex as a board member is investigating allegations of rape and torture by its guards in the Republic of the Congo. African Parks, which manages 22 national parks and protected areas across 12 countries, said the investigation was its 'highest priority' and encouraged anyone with knowledge of any abuse to contact it. The Duke of Sussex, Prince Harry, is listed as a board member of the non-profit organisation after serving as the organisation’s president for six years. Guards managed and paid by the charity had engaged in the beating, rape and torture of Indigenous people in the rainforests of the Republic of the Congo, according to allegations first reported by the Mail on Sunday. A statement from the African Parks board and chief executive said it had a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and was committed to upholding the rights of local and Indigenous people. It said an investigation had been launched after an unnamed board member was alerted by the charity Survival International to allegations of abuse by guards. But it accused Survival International of failing to cooperate with its inquiry. The statement said: 'We are aware of the serious allegations regarding human rights abuses by eco-guards against local people living adjacent to Odzala-Kokoua national park in the Republic of Congo, which have recently received media attention. We immediately launched an investigation through an external law firm based on the information we had available, while also urging Survival International to provide any and all facts they had. It’s unfortunate that they have chosen not to co-operate, despite repeated requests, and we continue to ask for their assistance. We encourage anyone with knowledge of any abuses to report them to us or to the Congolese law enforcement authorities, which will assist with the investigation and ensure that the perpetrators of any abuses are brought to justice.' The charity was founded in 2000 to protect Africa’s national parks and advance wildlife conservation on the continent and around the world. It manages more than 20m hectares of protected areas. Fiore Longo, head of Survival International’s conservation campaign, told the PA news agency that the story did not 'come as a surprise' as abuse cases had happened regularly, she said, in the region over many years. She added: 'With the arrival of protected areas during colonial times many of the locals have already been evicted. But it’s specifically around 2010, when African Parks took over, that the locals said the violence started being worse than before, because their park rangers would beat them every time they tried to get in the forest – which is their home – to collect medicinal plants, hunt and feed their families.' Longo said she had heard from her colleagues of cases of local women being raped, men having their heads put under water in rivers, and some being burned with hot wax and whipped.
6. <https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/13870> - A charity with strong ties to Prince Harry has been funding rangers responsible for horrific abuses against Indigenous people in the Congo, including torture and rape, according to a major investigation published in the UK’s Mail on Sunday. The abuses have taken place in Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the Republic of Congo, which is managed by African Parks – Prince Harry is a member of their Board of Directors, a position to which he was “elevated” in 2023, after having served as their President for six years. The investigation has uncovered evidence of countless atrocities committed by African Parks’ 'armed militia' against local Baka people. The organization has known for years that the abuses were taking place, but they have continued unabated. Two Baka men from a community who were evicted to make way for Odzala-Kokoua National Park. Many people in the village have been beaten or abused by park rangers. 'We are afraid that if park rangers see us in the forest they will beat us.' One Baka man told the Mail on Sunday’s Ian Birrell: 'African Parks are killing us slowly. We’re suffering so much that we might as well be dead.' Another said: 'The past was far better for us - and the reason is all down to African Parks.' A Baka man, Moyambi Fulbert, quoted in the report, had this message for Prince Harry: 'I’d tell him to stop supporting African Parks. He is a powerful man. He eats well and lives well - but we don’t have anything now and it’s all because of African Parks.' The Baka and other hunter-gatherers who have lived in and cared for the Congo Rainforest since time immemorial have seen much of their land stolen and turned into National Parks and other Protected Areas. They have been pushed out, and now live in dire conditions, landless and dependent on others, or turned into ‘tourist attractions.’ They are banned from entering the rainforest they once called home, while mining, oil, and logging companies, and trophy hunters, are considered “partners” of conservation and allowed to carry on with business as usual. Survival International Director Caroline Pearce said today: 'African Parks, along with other big conservation organizations like WWF, takes Indigenous land to turn it into militarized parks or reserves - and then their guards attack people like the Baka just for trying to live their lives. Prince Harry can help stop this. We’re calling on him to step down as a director of African Parks. He needs to distance himself from an organization that is complicit in evictions and the heinous abuse of Indigenous people. The organization’s funders must withdraw their funding until the Baka are allowed to return to the park and their land ownership rights are recognized. The abuses that the Mail on Sunday has uncovered are being repeated across Africa and Asia - this is not a one-off. The entire conservation model as practiced by the big conservation organizations is built on the theft of Indigenous land, and the dispossession of the people who are its rightful owners - just as in the colonial era. It’s time to decolonize conservation. Survival researchers who have been to Odzala-Kokoua are available for interview. Photos and video available.