

Mau Mau veteran speaks out: why Britain should pay

Gitu Wa Kahengeri, chair of the Mau Mau War Veterans' Association, spoke to Socialist Worker

“The new documents strengthen our case. How can they say that the Kenyan government is responsible for compensation when they didn't even hand over the files?

Colonial notice 913, proscribing the Mau Mau movement, was finally revoked on 29 October 2003. Immediately we set up the Mau Mau War Veterans' Association to represent the freedom fighters.

We went into the countryside to find people. We came together to seek justice.

The colonial government detained people in concentration camps without adequate food or medical facilities.

A generation was lost. People were beaten—their hands and legs broken. Some were castrated. Some women had bottles inserted into their private parts. We want compensation for these atrocities.

Now we have become old. We cannot support ourselves. I am grateful to the Kenya Human Rights Commission because they have used their resources and are willing to continue the case.

I joined the Mau Mau in 1946, when I was 17. I was 20 or 21 when I was detained, held in camps on Manda Island for seven years with my father, who was also a freedom fighter.

My mother and brothers were left at home. But they were not left alone. The colonialists used the “villagisation” scheme to control those who were thought to be Mau Mau sympathisers.

They created new villages for them to live in behind barbed wire. More than a million people were moved into them—they were more like detention camps.

They were denied freedom and rights.”