

VII. CONCLUSION

Women's property issues touch deeply the ways people live, think, and organize their social and economic lives. It's not just a matter of getting a few women in parliament. People feel threatened.

—Professor Yash Pal Ghai, chairman, Constitution of Kenya Review Commission, Nairobi, October 23, 2002

Property rights abuses inflicted on women in Kenya should be recognized for what they are: gross violations of women's human rights. Discriminatory property laws and practices impoverish women and their dependents, put their lives at risk by increasing their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other diseases, drive them into abhorrent living conditions, subject them to violence, and relegate them to dependence on men and social inequality.

Despite the slow recognition that property rights violations harm not just women and their dependents but Kenya's development as a whole, little has been done to prevent and redress these violations. Averting these abuses in a country where dispossessing women is considered normal will be difficult. A concerted effort is needed not just to improve legal protections, but to modify customary laws and practices and ultimately to change people's minds. With extreme poverty, a moribund economy, rampant violence, and catastrophic HIV/AIDS rates, Kenya can no longer afford to ignore women's property rights violations. Eliminating discrimination against women with respect to property rights is not only a human rights obligation; for many women, it is a matter of life and death.