

MPs 'taken in by Kalahari PR drive'

by Ben Flanagan

A BRITISH parliamentary group has angered human rights campaigners by promising to quell a tide of negative 'propaganda' over the eviction of indigenous Bushmen from their land in Botswana. The land contains rich diamond deposits over which South African giant De Beers has been granted rights.

Malcolm Moss, Shadow Minister for Culture, Media and Sport and chair of the all-party parliamentary Botswana group, has promised to 'set the record straight' by disputing allegations that the evictions of Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve are unwelcome.

'It is about the Botswanan government providing modern facilities to all of its people. The majority of [the Bushmen] prefer the new facilities. I didn't see Bushmen suffering as a result of the move,' said Moss, on his return from a



1,500 Bushmen have been evicted. Corbis

Botswanan government-funded trip. However Stephen Corry, director of Survival International, says that such trips involve visits to 'showcase' relocation sites, and not the reserve itself. 'The government is forcibly moving people from their ancestral land. It is destroying them. The evictions coincided with the diamond find.'

Moss denies that his conclusions, or the eviction policy itself, have been prej-

udiced by the diamond deposits. 'I have no contact with De Beers - I only have contact with Debswana,' he said. Debswana, which owns the right to mine diamonds in the Kalahari, is the name of the joint venture between the government and De Beers.

Moss was one of eight MPs and peers who visited Botswana on a trip organised by the Botswana High Commission in London. It was latest in a long line of parliamentary visits in a PR blitz involving the 'red carpet treatment'.

Baroness Tonge of Kew - who was on a previous trip funded by De Beers - described the Bushmen's hunter-gatherer lifestyle as 'primitive' and 'stone age' in a House of Lords debate last month.

Since 1997, more than 1,500 Gana and Gwi Bushmen have been evicted from their homes in the Kalahari. This has led to 243 individuals taking court action against the Botswanan government.