

Forest-dwellers can't be evicted from Niyamgiri: Centre to SC

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The Central Government on Friday told the Supreme Court that the forest-dwellers cannot be evicted from proposed bauxite mining sites in the Niyamgiri Hills in Kalahandi district till the "community and individual" rights of the residents are decided under the law.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests, in an affidavit filed before a Bench headed by Justice Aftab Alam, said, "No eviction of eligible forest-dwellers can take place till the process of recognition and vesting of individual and community forest rights under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act is completed."

The affidavit also contended that the locals' religious sentiment towards the Niyamgiri Hills should not be hurt.

On December 6 last, the court had directed the Central Government to file an affidavit making clear its stand on the Act. Quoting from the Act, the Government said the rights of forest-dwellers need to be ascertained first.

The court is hearing a plea of the Odisha Mining Corporation against a decision of the Centre to withdraw environmental clearance given to Vedanta to mine bauxite in the region.