

**“EVER SINCE SOMEONE STOOD UP FOR ME,  
I AM RESPECTED, VALUED AND HAPPY.” – CLAIRE**

When Claire’s\* husband passed away, she struggled to care for their four young children while dealing with her own serious and chronic health issues. Like most of her neighbors, she was very poor, but Claire was able to build a life for her son and three daughters, raising them in the small home she and her husband had shared outside of Uganda’s capital city, Kampala.

Nearly five years after her husband’s death, the value of Claire’s very modest house increased when a foreign investor purchased a nearby plot of land. When her late husband’s relatives learned of the development, they came to Claire’s home for a family meeting and made a shocking announcement: **They were kicking her out of her home, selling it and keeping the profits – and there was nothing she could do to stop them.**

Though women’s rights to shared property in a marriage are guaranteed by Ugandan law, widows are often at the mercy of their deceased spouses’ relatives, who use a widow’s vulnerability to lay claim to any property that belonged to the couple. Property grabbing is theft from the most de-



*When would-be perpetrators attempted to steal Claire’s home, she was protected through the strong advocacy of IJM Uganda’s legal team.*

fenseless members of a community and can leave widows and orphans with nowhere to live, nowhere to work and nowhere to grow food in the aftermath of a death. It is not just an issue of property: It’s an issue of survival.

Panicked, Claire reported her relatives’ threat to local authorities, but the perpetrators distorted the truth and Claire was left without an ally. She tried to work out a temporary agreement with her relatives to stop them, but they moved forward with their illegal plan and met with a potential buyer, offering the home for sale. Despite the fact that the relatives had no proof the home was even theirs to sell, the buyer readily agreed to the deal.

The day before the sale was to go through, Claire discovered what was about to happen. She was terrified. She and her four young children were about to become homeless.

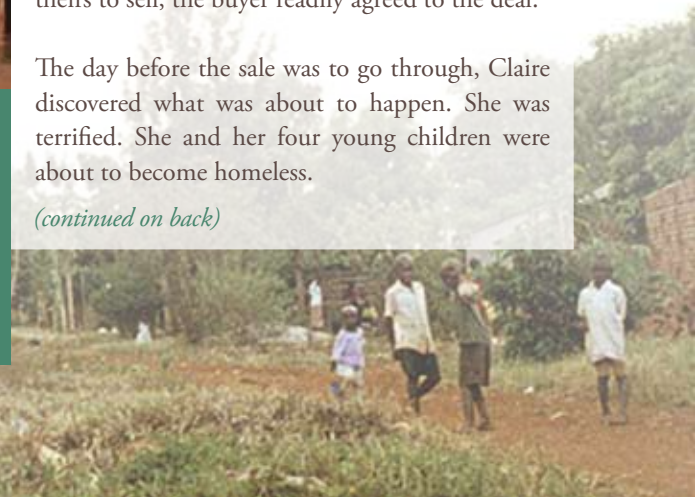
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*Claire’s home*

**MORE THAN A PROPERTY ISSUE – AN ISSUE OF SURVIVAL**

“For millions of poor people, their greatest and most hopeful source of wealth and well-being comes from the little plot of land they have acquired for housing and for cultivation. With a patch of land, they can provide a shelter for their family, grow a bit of food, and even operate a small enterprise. Take away their land and you have stolen their means of survival,” explains IJM President Gary Haugen.





## KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

In addition to serving individual victims, IJM seeks transformational change in Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia by training entire communities on their property rights. In Rwanda, IJM recently hosted a community theater event that empowered 2300 people, educating them on their rights and how to protect those in their community vulnerable to abuse.

*(Image: A victim of property grabbing assisted by IJM Rwanda shares her story with her community.)*

**For Claire, to be thrown from her home would be a death sentence.** She did not have the resources to purchase another house for her family. She knew that the only place she would be welcome was her home village in a remote district – far away from the hospital care she needed to manage her illness. Without this care, she would die.

Claire had learned about IJM from a counselor in her community and immediately called the Uganda office. An IJM attorney quickly called the interested buyer and warned him that the purchase would be illegitimate and illegal. The call was placed just in time: The buyer agreed to delay the sale.

Though Claire was safe from the immediate danger, it was critical to ensure that she had long-term legal protection. IJM's staff arranged for a legal mediation in order to establish Claire's right to her property.

On a balmy morning, Claire, her relatives, the interested buyer and IJM attorney Juliet Musoke gathered for a legal meeting of life-or-death importance. Though the proceedings took place in Claire's modest brick

house rather than a grand marble courtroom, it took great courage for her to stand up to the perpetrators – but with a strong advocate on her side, Claire was not alone.

Juliet explained to the perpetrators that their actions were illegal and indefensible – and that **she was willing to take them to the highest court in the land to ensure that Claire and her children were not left destitute and homeless.**

The perpetrators lost their swagger. Presented with the facts, and realizing that with strong legal representation, Claire would not be bullied into homelessness, her relatives dropped their claim.

Juliet drew up a legally binding document for all present to sign, stipulating that Claire was the sole owner of the property and that she was to remain safely in her home. The message was clear: Claire was not alone, she was not disposable. The law – and strong advocates – were on her side. Her response was simple: "I am overjoyed," she told staff.

**Today, Claire is safe on her own property, and she lives with hope for a secure future.** IJM aftercare staff are assisting her to start a small pig-raising business, which will be a sustainable source of income for her and her children.

When IJM Uganda launched an intensive new program to protect the property rights of widows in Claire's community, she was asked to speak to the audience. Before a crowd of nearly 100 people, including local government officials, members of the press and church leaders, Claire shared with grace and confidence the truth: In safety, she and her children can now live in peace.

**IJM's advocates on the frontlines work every day to make security and hope a reality for widows and orphans across Africa.**