



**OPEN LETTER FROM ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TO PRESIDENT YOWERI MUSEVENI OF UGANDA AND PRESIDENT FELIX TSHISEKEDI OF DRC**

***A call to avoid sensitive ecosystems in the new round of oil exploration licensing in the Albertine Graben***

**May 20, 2019**

Dear Your Excellencies,

We, the undersigned environmental and human rights civil society organisations (CSOs) from Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), call on your governments through the Ministry of Energy and Ministry of Hydrocarbons for Uganda and DRC respectively to avoid licensing out sensitive ecosystems during the new round of oil licensing in the Albertine Graben.

Your Excellencies, on Wednesday May 8, 2019, Hon. Irene Muloni, Uganda's Minister of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD) launched Uganda's oil exploration licensing round for five oil blocks. The launch took place in Mombasa, Kenya. Ngaji oil block, which is found in the ecosensitive Lake Edward and Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) was put up for bidding. The block was not bid for in the first round of exploration licensing due to public pressure.

On the other hand, Hon. John Kwet-Mwen Kwet, the Minister of Hydrocarbons in the DRC has apparently rolled out the call for bids for oil exploration in DRC's three sedimentary basins covering 21 oil blocks including 50,000 km in the East Rift basin within the Albertine Graben. Block V which is located in Virunga National Park in the Albertine Graben is one of the blocks that could be put up for licensing.

Your Excellencies, we note with concern that the planned and ongoing oil exploration licensing round for both Uganda and DRC is taking place in and around the Albertine Graben which harbors some of the most sensitive ecosystems of national and international importance.

For instance, the Albertine Graben is home to Virunga National Park in the Eastern DRC which is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site and accommodates 43% of Africa's bird species, 27% of Africa's mammals and more than 10% of its reptiles, amphibians, and plants in addition to several rare and endangered species that exist nowhere else in the world.

The Albertine Graben is also a home to Queen Elizabeth National Park and Lake Edward in Uganda, which are shared between our countries. Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda is also classified a Humanity and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO while Lake Edward is classified as a Ramsar site.

The above ecosystems also play important roles for climatological stability, carbon absorption, and supports millions of people through the provision of food, fresh water and income from agriculture, fisheries, and tourism.



Allowing oil exploration and exploitation activities in these ecosystems will not only negatively affect the biodiversity in them but also the communities who depend on them for survival especially here in Africa where oil activities have continued to cause environmental degradation, human rights abuses and fueled conflicts resulting into extrajudicial killings among others.

It is also important to note that both the Ugandan and DRC governments are signatories to the Ramsar and UNESCO Conventions on conservation which call for the proper conservation of World Heritage sites located in their territories.

These conventions make it mandatory for all signatory countries to commit to avoid any activities that might directly or indirectly degrade the cultural and natural heritage of these sites. If oil exploration is undertaken in these areas and other sensitive ecosystems, it would be an abuse of our countries' commitments. As heads of state, it's your call to ensure that our countries do not default on the commitments we made by allowing oil exploration activities in Ngaji oil block, Block V and other sensitive ecosystems.

In addition, Your Excellencies, both Uganda and DRC are signatory to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change which came into force during the 21st Conference of Parties (COP) meeting in Paris, France in 2015. The agreement calls on all signatory countries to cut their Greenhouse Gas Emission (GHG) and limit the global temperature rises to less than 2 degrees Celsius or to pre-industrial levels of less than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The commitments made by our countries under the Paris Climate Change Agreement mandate your excellencies to ensure that any activities that result in the generation and release of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere are limited. Fossil fuels are the biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, oil exploitation itself contributes to the carbon footprint that our countries must limit per commitments under the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

Indeed, the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 2018 called on all United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) member countries to further cut their emissions way beyond the commitments made in the Nationally Determined Contributions if the 2030 goal is to be achieved. Both Uganda and DRC are members of the IPCC and it's our moral duty to respect the commitments we make.

Further, the May 2019 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) global assessment warns of nature's dangerous decline with more than 1 million species threatened with extinction. The current global responses to address the above challenge are insufficient. We need 'transformative changes' to restore and protect nature. We cannot continue destroying our earth and natural heritage and not pay the consequences. Our life-supporting 'safety net' is stretched almost to a breaking point. We urge DRC and Uganda to go beyond their vested interests and make a choice for the broader public good, for the well-being of humanity.



Your Excellencies, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with over 200 state and government agencies including the Uganda Wildlife Authority and 1,000 NGO members have adopted more than 1,200 resolutions since the Union was established in 1948. These resolutions have been influential on national and international nature conservation policy including on issues around indigenous peoples, gender and the recognition of conservation as part of human rights, in addition to conserving threatened species and protected areas, and helping to design effective approaches that are now global standards.

At the last IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2016, IUCN members voted on a recommendation that *“calls on governments to prohibit environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development in all IUCN categories of protected areas, and to take measures to ensure that all activities are compatible with the conservation objectives of these areas, through appropriate, transparent and rigorous pre-emptive appraisal processes, such as international best practice environmental and social impact assessments, strategic environmental assessments, and appropriate regulation.”* Allowing oil activities in eco-sensitive areas would be contrary to this and other resolutions.

Furthermore, the Albertine Graben where the new oil exploration is planned is a diverse ecosystem that generates huge revenues from tourism, agriculture, fisheries and others for our countries. The revenues support our economies while promoting conservation. For instance, the 2017 estimates from World Wide Fund (WWF) International indicates that if Virunga National Park is managed sustainably, it has the potential to generate over US\$235 million per year for the DRC government. This is way beyond what the oil industry would generate.

Furthermore, Your Excellencies, the exploration and production of oil around the world has negatively impacted on the local and host communities including women, children, the elderly and others resulting from mass displacement of communities from their land, clearance of vegetation which affects agriculture and livelihoods of communities and others. All these activities leave communities worse off than they were before oil was discovered in their areas.

Finally, Your Excellencies, oil exploration and exploitation cannot coexist with conservation and nature protection. Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) is a clear example of how critical ecosystems are being destroyed by allowing polluting oil activities and oil infrastructure in highly eco-sensitive areas, threatening the survival of endangered species and biodiversity at large.

Your Excellencies, we would also like to remind you that both Uganda and DRC are blessed with huge potential for renewable energy in form of solar, wind power, geothermal and others which offer better alternatives to oil while conserving the environment. If we invested in our renewable energy as opposed to oil, our countries would thrive.

## **Recommendations**



In view of the above, the undersigned environmental and human rights CSOs from Uganda and DRC recommend the following:

### **To the Ugandan president**

- Immediately direct the Minister of Energy and Mineral Development to stop any plans to carry out oil exploration activities in sensitive ecosystems of the Albertine Graben including Ngaji oil block and other UNESCO in addition to Ramsar sites.
- Work with the DRC government to harmonise laws on transboundary conservation of natural resources and benefit sharing of natural resources in the Albertine Graben.

### **To the president of DRC**

- Immediately direct the Minister of hydrocarbons to halt the ongoing efforts to license out sensitive ecosystems including Block V in Virunga National Park and other UNESCO sites such as Salonga National Park and Ramsar sites such as the Lufira river basin.
- Work with the Ugandan government to harmonise laws on transboundary conservation of natural resources and benefit sharing of natural resources in the Albertine Graben.

### **To both Uganda and DRC presidents**

- Respect the national and international commitments including commitments made under the Paris Climate Change Agreement to address climate change.
- Scale up national commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with global goals and commitments.
- Promote tourism as an engine of sustainable economic development and promotion of community livelihoods.
- Prioritise investments in renewable energy to promote sustainable development of our economies.
- Adopt integrated management and cross-sectoral approaches that take into account the trade-offs of food and energy production, infrastructure, freshwater and coastal management, and biodiversity conservation.

In conclusion **Your Excellencies**, we the undersigned environmental and human rights CSOs are committed to mobilise local communities, the national and international community, the media and all well-wishers to reject any activities to carry out oil exploration activities in sensitive ecosystems in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Virunga National Park, Salonga National Park and Lake Edward.

Thank you.



## Signatories

No.	Name of organisation	Country
1.	Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)	Uganda
2.	National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)	Uganda
3.	Guild Presidents' Forum on Governance (GPFOG)	Uganda
4.	World Voices Uganda (WVU)	Uganda
5.	South Western Institute for Policy and Advocacy (SOWIPA)	Uganda
6.	Kasese Consortium on Climate Change Adaptation and Biodiversity Conservation (CABIC)	Uganda
7.	Green Organisation Africa (GOA)	Uganda
8.	Innovation pour le Développement et la Protection de l'Environnement, (IDPE)	DR Congo
9.	Association des Mamans pour la Lutte contre le Traumatisme (A.M.A.L.U.T)	DR Congo
10.	Fédération des Comités des Pêcheurs Individuels du Lac Edouard, (FECOPEILE)	DR Congo
11.	Alerte Congolaise pour l'Environnement et le Droit de l'Homme, (ACEDH)	DR Congo
12.	Green Journalist Network, GJN	DR Congo
13.	Societe civile forces vives de la Republic Democratique du Congo	DR Congo
14.	Synergie des Vanniers Ami de la Nature, (SVAN)	DR Congo
15.	Synergie des Ecologistes pour la Paix et le Développement, (SEPD)	DR Congo
16.	Forum Global de Chercheurs d'Alternatives, (FGCCA)	DR Congo
17.	Programme d'Intégration et Développement du Peuple Autochtones Pygmées, (PIDP)	DR Congo
18.	Forum des Engagés pour le Développement Durable, (FORED)	DR Congo
19.	Bureau d'Études et d'appui au Développement du territoire de Walikale, (BEDEWA)	DR Congo
20.	Grande Action pour le Développement, (G.A.D)	DR Congo



21.	Forêts Communautaires pour le Développement Rural, (FOCODER)	DR Congo
<b>Signed in solidarity with the Ugandan and DRC CSOs:</b>		
1.	350.org	Africa
2.	African Conservation Foundation - International	International
3.	Arcus Foundation	United Kingdom
4.	Bob Brown Foundation	Australia
5.	eCountability	United Kingdom
6.	EcoNexus	United Kingdom
7.	ERA/Friends of the Earth	Nigeria
8.	European Network of Networkers for Ecological Reflection and Action	Germany
9.	Friends of the Earth	Togo
10.	Friends of the Siberian Forests	Russia
11.	Friends of the Earth International	International
12.	GAIA	UK
13.	Global Witness	United Kingdom
14.	Groundwork	South Africa
15.	IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands Foundation	Netherlands
16.	Kate Brooks	Filmmaker
17.	Marc Ona Essangui - Secrétaire Exécutif Brainforest et Prix Goldman 2009	Gabon
18.	Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth)	Netherlands
19.	Pro Natura (Friends of the Earth)	Switzerland
20.	Rainforest Foundation Norway	Norway



21.	Synchronicity Earth	United Kingdom
22.	Zoological Society of London	United Kingdom
23.	WILD Foundation	United States