



September 16, 2020

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
KAMPALA & HOIMA**

**CSOS DEMAND FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF THEIR MEMBERS AND AN
END TO POLICE INTIMIDATION**

Civil society actors and tourism operators working under the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBC) to stop illegal sugarcane growing and oil activities in Bugoma forest and the ecosystems around the forest are *demanding for an immediate release of nine of their members who were arrested by police in Hoima district.*

“Our members travelled to Hoima to participate in a peaceful demonstration aimed at stopping the destruction of Bugoma forest for sugarcane growing and to stop the risks of oil activities to critical biodiversity resources.

Two of our group members were arrested on their way to a radio talkshow at Spice FM in Hoima. The two were set to discuss the risks and dangers of destroying Bugoma forest for sugarcane growing and allowing oil activities in critical biodiversity areas including rivers, lakes, national parks, forests, wetlands and others.

The talkshow was also aimed at providing information on the planned peaceful protests where the civil society leaders were supposed to walk from Hoima and Kikuube districts to Bugoma forest reserve to address a press conference,” Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, the CEO of AFIEGO and a member of SBC, says.

It is notable that the planned protest was aimed at expressing displeasure with government agencies that have connived to give away Bugoma forest for sugarcane growing.

It was also to expose how the rush for oil exploitation has attracted dubious companies that are conniving with government to conduct illegal and irregular Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA), issue ESIA certificates of approval, proceed with illegal activities in forests, national parks, rivers, lakes, wetlands and others without complete and approved mitigation

plans. These illegal and irregular activities are leading to the destruction of forests, water falls, national parks and other natural iconic futures.

Mr. Kamugisha adds, “In addition to the two who were arrested while on their way to the radio talkshow, seven other SBC members and partners were also arrested.

The seven were arrested at Hoima police station while trying to negotiate the release of the two who spent the night in the police cells.”

The arrested include:

- (i) Sandra Atusinguza- AFIEGO
- (ii) Venex Watebawa- WEMNET/Journalist
- (iii) Joshua Mutale- Freelance journalist
- (iv) Sam Kayiwa- Human Rights for Journalists Uganda
- (v) Vincent Sekitto – Save Bugoma Campaign
- (vi) Ismail Kashokwa – Save Bugoma Campaign
- (vii) Joseph Mujuni – Oil Refinery Residents Association
- (viii) Moses Mukiibi – Oil Refinery Residents Association
- (ix) John Kibego- Save Bugoma Forest Campaign

“We are demanding for the immediate release of our campaigners from illegal detention. They were engaged in efforts to uphold Ugandans’ constitutional right to live in a clean and healthy environment.

The Constitution, National Environment Act of 2019 and other laws empower Ugandans to defend the above right and police should not deter Ugandans, including our campaigners, from defending Ugandans’ environmental and other rights,” Mr. Kamugisha says.

Mr. Ibrahim Kasozi, a freelance journalist, adds, “Environmental and human rights defenders [EHRDs] in Uganda are intimidated, harrassed, arrested and treated in all manner of unbefitting ways. Only yesterday, a coalition of human rights defenders [expressed concern](#) over the arrest, intimidation and other violations against EHRDs. Security agencies and police were identified as major violators of the rights of EHRDs and they were warned to stop.

Unfortunately, despite the warnings, police continues to arrest EHRDs as it did our own. We are demanding that police stops violating the constitutional rights of EHRDs. If the institution fails to do so, we will join with partner EHRDs to cause the prosecution of individual police officers who violate the rights of EHRDs.”

The CSOs members also continue to call on Ugandans to engage in efforts to save Bugoma forest and critical protected areas from land grabbers, sugarcane growing, oil and other threats.

SBC’s Mr. Gaster Kiyingi says, “Bugoma forest and other critical biodiversity in the Albertine Graben and across the country at large are important for the survival of everyone, including the police officers. The biodiversity in form of forests, national parks, game reserves, lakes, rivers, wetlands and others play climate stability, water provisioning, food security, tourism and other roles.

Ugandans have done a good job speaking against the give-away of the forest and dangerous oil activities. Police and government in general must respect citizens’ rights.

Ugandans, cultural institutions, development partners and all people of goodwill should also call on the Uganda police and government at large to release the environmental and human rights campaigners and stop intimidating them. Injustice should not be tolerated in Uganda.”

It is notable that the protestors were going to adhere to the COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) during the demonstration.

ENDS

SIGNATORIES

- Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)
- Water and Environment Media Network (WEMNET)
- Association of Uganda Tour Operators (AUTO)
- Association for the Conservation of Bugoma Forest
- Tree Talk Plus
- Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA)
- Guild Presidents’ Forum on Governance (GPFOG)
- Citizens Concern Africa (CICOA)
- Action Coalition on Climate Change (ACCC)
- South Western Institute for Policy and Advocacy (SOWIPA)
- World Voices Uganda (WVU)
- Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA)
- Centre for Constitutional Governance (CCG)
- Twimukye Womens Organisation
- Graffen Organisation –Butimba
- Association of oil-affected youth
- Center for Energy Governance
- African Initiative on Food security and Environment