



May 26, 2021

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
KAMPALA**

AFIEGO AND PARTNERS DEMAND FOR RELEASE OF AFIEGO'S BULIISA DISTRICT FIELD OFFICER

Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) and its partners are demanding for the immediate release of AFIEGO's Buliisa district Field Officer, Mr. Maxwell Atuhura.

Mr. Atuhura was arrested yesterday on May 25, 2021 and was detained at the Buliisa Central Police Station (CPS). He spent the night at the police station. The charges against him hadn't been communicated by the time this press statement was issued.

Instead, Mr. Atuhura was today May 26, 2021 transferred to Hoima, where the regional police headquarters are located.

Mr. Atuhura was arrested alongside an Italian journalist, Ms. Federica Marsi, whose work has been published by the UK's *Independent* and Al Jazeera.

Prior to their arrest, Mr. Atuhura and Ms. Marsi had been conducting interviews with community members whose land is being acquired or has been acquired for the Tilenga oil project in Buliisa district.

The communities have complained of being unfairly and inadequately compensated. Cases to stop the unfair and inadequate compensation were filed in courts including in France.

Efforts by civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities to defend the communities' land and environment rights have resulted in reprisals from the state.

"Security agencies in Uganda have criminalised the work of CSOs that are working for the protection of the environment and oil-affected communities' rights. We are increasingly seeing arrests, intimidation and threats, which are aimed at stopping our work.

This is unfortunate because if CSOs and well-meaning Ugandans fail to protect communities and the environment, the oil that government officials are celebrating will turn into the country's biggest curse.

A country cannot make its people landless, impoverish them and destroy the environment that the people depend on because of oil exploitation and that country expects oil to be a blessing. This is why the work of CSOs and the media must not be criminalised. If CSOs and the media are gagged, Uganda and its citizens will pay a high price," Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, AFIEGO's CEO, says.

It is noteworthy that Ms. Marsi was released yesterday on condition that she returned to Kampala, which she did.

“Ms. Marsi was yet to complete her assignment but because she was intimidated and ordered to leave the oil region, she had to for her own safety. If oil companies are ‘acting transparently’ as they profess and if their work is good, why is there a fear of scrutiny?”

Uganda also professes to be a democratic state that promotes access to information. This access must not be curtailed and it is most unfortunate that our colleague was arrested and Ms. Marsi was stopped from doing her work,” AFIEGO’s Ms. Sandra Atusinguza, who supported Ms. Marsi to conduct interviews in Hoima, says.

AFIEGO and its partners are calling on all well-meaning Ugandans and its partners to demand for the release of Mr. Atuhura, whose only crime is wishing and working to see that his community is not left landless and impoverished because of oil exploitation efforts in the country.

AFIEGO and our partners will also pursue all the legal means possible to secure Mr. Atuhura’s release and to promote better operational space in Uganda.

ENDS

Signatories

1. Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)
2. Navigators of Development Association (NAVODA)
3. Buliisa Youth Volunteers (BYV)
4. Youth for Green Communities (YGC)
5. Guild Presidents’ Forum on Governance (GPFOG)
6. Action Coalition on Climate Change (ACCC)
7. South Western Institute for Policy and Advocacy (SOWIPA)
8. World Voices Uganda (WVU)
9. Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA)
10. Center for Energy Governance (CEG)
11. Community Transformation Foundation Network (COTFONE)
12. African Initiative on Food security and Environment
13. Kwantaniza Women’s Organisation
14. Twimukye Womens Organisation
15. Graffen Organisation –Butimba
16. Association of oil-affected youth
17. Friends of Nature
18. Friends for Environment and Development

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