



May 15, 2018

**COMMUNIQUE CALLING ON PRESIDENT YOWERI MUSEVENI OF UGANDA AND PRESIDENT JOSEPH KABILA OF DRC TO STOP OIL ACTIVITIES IN GREATER VIRUNGA LANDSCAPE**

**Introduction**

Your Excellencies, we civil society organisations (CSOs) working for the promotion of environmental and human rights protection in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) take this opportunity to thank you for your efforts under co-operations and collaborations such the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration (GVTC) and others being undertaken to jointly and sustainably develop our two countries while conserving the environment.

Such efforts fall well within international efforts such as the Sustainable Development Goals targeted at sustainable development and conservation in addition to the Ngurdoto-Tanzania Agreement of 2007. In the agreement, both Your Excellencies agreed to work together for the joint management and use of transboundary natural resources.

In addition, we thank you for choosing dialogue over other means including the negotiations that are ongoing over the payment of the \$10 billion reparations Uganda owes the DRC. As you will recall Your Excellencies, the above reparations were awarded by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to the DRC in 2005 and it is commendable that efforts to ensure payment of the reparations without causing negative impacts on innocent citizens in both our countries are ongoing. We hope that dialogue will be finalised with good outcomes for both countries being realised.

Your Excellencies, for more than ten years now, we, the above-mentioned CSOs from Uganda and the DRC, have been working together to promote cross-border conservation of natural resources in the Great Lakes region. Our efforts have extended towards ensuring that no oil activities take place in transboundary sensitive ecosystems including Virunga National Park, Queen Elizabeth National Park, Lake Edward and others.

Through our efforts including engaging your offices through joint CSO declarations, advocacy letters and holding joint press conferences both in Uganda and the DRC among others, we have expressed our disapproval of oil activities in eco-sensitive areas and have rallied you, your governments and national in addition to international oil companies to avoid oil activities in sensitive ecosystems in Uganda and the DRC.

As a result of these engagements, we have registered a number of success including protecting Ngaji oil block in the eco-sensitive transboundary Greater Virunga landscape from being licensed out for exploration in Uganda in addition to pressuring British oil company, SOCO International PLC, from conducting oil exploration activities in Virunga National Park. We believe these actions contributed to the protection of the transboundary Greater Virunga landscape for the common good of both countries.

However, while we count the above achievements and continue calling on both Uganda and the DRC to officially commit, through a statement by Your Excellencies, never to conduct any oil activities in or around protected areas in accordance with international commitments, it is disheartening to see that the government of DRC has set in motion plans to redraw the boundaries of UNESCO listed World Heritage Sites, Salonga and Virunga national parks. These efforts by the DRC are targeted at allowing oil exploration activities in the parks.

Your Excellencies, it will be recalled that the Greater Virunga landscape, of which Virunga National Park is a part, is a biodiversity hotspot harboring some of the planet's endangered species. Other biodiverse protected areas so critical to humanity that they are listed by UNESCO as World Heritage and Ramsar Sites in the landscape include Bwindi Impenetrable and Rwenzori Mountains national parks (World Heritage Sites), Queen Elizabeth National Park (Man and Biosphere Reserve), and Lake Edward (Ramsar site).

Your Excellencies, the move by the government of the DRC to redraw boundaries of two national parks including Virunga National Park in the critical Greater Virunga landscape has been seen by above-mentioned CSOs as negative development that will have far-reaching consequences on the efforts of managing and conserving the Greater Virunga.

### **Observations**

The CSOs make the following observations in regards to the DRC government's move to redraw boundaries of the two national parks.

- a) **Signatory to bilateral agreements:** The CSOs observe that both the DRC and Uganda are signatory to regional and international agreements including the Ngurdoto agreement of 2007 that among others aims at harmonising conservation efforts of cross-border natural resources amidst oil and gas discoveries. While the agreement gives both countries a duty to ensure the sustainable management of transboundary natural resources, redrawing the map of Virunga National Park and exploring for oil in Ngaji oil block in Queen Elizabeth

National Park and Lake Edward is against the provisions in the above agreement. Moreover, Queen Elizabeth, Salonga and Virunga national parks are UNESCO Human Biosphere and World Heritage sites respectively while Lake Edward is a Ramsar site. Being signatory to the treaties through which the parks and lakes were conferred the above statuses, Uganda and the DRC are duty bound to uphold the treaties.

- b) **Compel Uganda to redraw national park borders too:** The CSOs also observe that the move by DRC to redraw the boundaries of its protected areas with the purpose of allowing oil activities have far reaching consequences as they will also push the Ugandan government to redraw the Queen Elizabeth National Park boundaries to allow oil activities in the park. This cannot be allowed as livelihoods of millions of citizens engaged in farming, tourism, fishing and other activities supported by natural resources in the landscape will be at risk! Moreover, the water, electricity, cultural in addition to the recreational needs of millions of Ugandan, DRC, South Sudanese, Sudanese and Egyptian citizens who depend on resources in the landscape and on River Nile will also be at risk. Because Lake Edward empties itself in the White Nile which is the headwaters of River Nile, degradation of ecosystems in the Greater Virunga landscape poses a threat to all the Nile riparian states.
- c) **Global transition to clean energy:** The CSOs further observe that both Uganda and the DRC are signatories and beneficiaries of the global initiatives promoting investments in clean and renewable energy such as Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL), Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 and the Paris Climate Change Agreement among others. These initiatives are promoting transition from fossil and dirty energy to clean energies and efforts to redraw boundaries of national parks to allow oil activities in protected areas are against these efforts.
- d) **Impact on tourism:** Furthermore, the CSOs note that the Greater Virunga landscape is one of the biggest tourism destination in the region generating huge amounts of revenues to both economies due to gorilla tracking and other activities. In addition, the landscape provides other ecosystem services such as food, raw materials, medicinal plants and others, which support livelihoods of citizens. These services will be threatened with oil activities.

## **Recommendations**

In view of the above observations, we recommend the following,

- Cancel indefinitely plans by DRC to redraw boundaries of the Salonga and Virunga national parks to allow oil activities in the parks.
- Indefinitely cancel all plans by the Ugandan government to licence out Ngaji oil block located in Lake Edward and Queen Elizabeth National Park for oil activities.

- Increase investment in renewable energy as both countries have enormous renewable energy potential in solar. This will also contribute to the achievement of global goals such as the SDG 7, SE4All and the Paris Climate Change Agreement among others
- Promote tourism over oil to diversify the economic base and increase investments in social infrastructure such as health services, education, roads and others.

Both the Ugandan and DRC CSOs are ready and willing to work with both governments to ensure that the sensitive ecosystems in Greater Virunga landscape are protected amidst the oil development threats.

### Done at Kampala

#### Signatories:

No.	Name of the organization	County
1.	Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)	Uganda
2.	Innovation pour le Développement et la Protection de l'Environnement (IDPE/SEPD)	DR Congo
3.	CPSC-NK/FPJDD	DR Congo
4.	MAIDENI Asbl	DR Congo
6.	Federation of fishermen of Lake Edward (FECOPEILE)	DR Congo
8.	SORADEC/SEPD	DR Congo
9.	MERV/SEPD	DR Congo
10.	National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)	Uganda
13.	Guild Presidents' Forum on Oil Governance (GPFOG)	Uganda
14.	World Voices Uganda (WVU)	Uganda
15.	South Western Institute for Policy and Advocacy (SOWIPA)	Uganda

16.	Kasese Consortium on Climate Change Adaptation and Biodiversity Conservation (CABIC)	Uganda
17.	Center for Constitutional Governance (CCG)	Uganda
18.	Green Organisation Africa (GOA)	Uganda
19.	Oil Refinery Residents Association (RRA)	Uganda