



13th/April/2020

CSO STATEMENT CALLING ON MINISTRY OF ENERGY TO RELEASE REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM OIL SPILL SCARE IN HOIMA

Introduction

1. We, civil society organisations (CSOs) working for the promotion of environmental conservation and protection of communities' livelihoods amidst extractives activities in the Albertine Rift, are calling on Ministry of Energy to make public the investigation report from an explosion that occurred at a geothermal energy exploration well at Kibiro landing site in Hoima district.
2. The well, which is one of eight that have been drilled in Kibiro as government explores for geothermal energy, was being drilled by Royal Techno Industries Ltd. This company was contracted by the Ministry of Energy to explore for geothermal energy near the Kibiro hot springs at Lake Albert. Both the hot springs and lake have environmental, economic and cultural significance. As such, the geothermal energy exploration project at Kibiro faced resistance from communities and culturalists.
3. Despite the resistance, exploration for geothermal energy began in February 2020 in Kibiro. A few weeks later, on March 28 and 29, 2020, explosions in which drilling mud and crude oil are said to have spilled occurred. The drilling mud and crude oil like substances flowed into Lake Albert.
4. Despite the dangers of an oil spill, a government team consisting of officials from the Ministry of Energy, Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU) and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) only visited the oil spill site days later, on March 2, 2020. Later on, the team promised to release a report that would state what substances spilled. The report was expected to be released by Sunday April 5, 2020. This report is yet to be made public however. We are calling on Ministry of Energy to immediately make the report public.

Other concerns

5. The geothermal explosion had a number of impacts. For instance, fishermen suffered costs. Debris from the well affected their nets and however much they washed their nets, the debris failed to come out of the nets. Other people were also affected with houses being damaged, communities' animals drinking contaminated water and others. The inhabitants of Kibiro village engage in fishing, pastoralism, salt production and tourism. These activities were affected by the explosion.
6. In addition, the substances that were spilled from the geothermal well including crude oil like substances flowed into Lake Albert. Communities, which could see a film of oil floating on top of the lake, were afraid to use water from the lake. They therefore resorted to buying water, which they can ill afford now that there is a disruption of economic activities because of the Coronavirus pandemic. At a time when government has recommended that communities wash their hands as many times as possible to prevent the spread of Coronavirus, burdening communities with the task of buying water could see the communities fail to adequately wash their hands to protect themselves.
7. Community members also suffered psychological distress. Their right to live in a clean and healthy environment as is provided for in the 1995 Uganda Constitution was also affected. The debris from the explosion and the pungent smell of the crude oil like substances that filled the air following the explosion distressed the communities and denied them their above-mentioned rights. This is unfortunate.
8. Furthermore, contamination of Lake Albert could affect communities' food security and fishermen's income as pollution of the lake could hurt fish catches. Already, the activities of fishermen on Lake Albert are constrained or stand to be constrained due to conflicts on the lake with fishermen from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), oil activities on the lake and others.

Our recommendations

In view of the above, we make the following recommendations:

- (a). We are calling on the Ministry of Energy to make public the investigation report that shows how the spillage occurred and the contents of the spill. The report also needs to show the impact of the spillage on the soil, waters of Lake Albert and communities. **The report should be made public by April 15, 2020.**

- (b) Further, Ministry of Energy and NEMA should immediately make public the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) report for the geothermal project and show evidence of community consultations and their consent to the said geothermal project.
- (c) In addition, the geothermal project activities should be halted and the license to Royal Techno Industries Ltd should be revoked for endangering critical biodiversity and community livelihoods as well conducting such a risky project amongst the communities without their consent.
- (d) Furthermore, any government official who allowed the project to proceed without community consent and/or without an ESIA should be arrested and prosecuted.
- (e) In addition, Ministry of Energy should compensate the fisherfolk and community members that suffered damages following the spillage. This compensation should be paid before the end of April 2020.
- (f) Furthermore, parliament should use its oversight powers to censor the Minister of Energy if they fail to immediately address the dangers caused by the Kibiro spill and compensate the affected communities.
- (g) The Ministry of Energy should also make public the agreements signed with Royal Techno Industries Ltd to enable the public get the right information to participate in the processes and demand for transparency.
- (g) The Ministry of Energy and government in general should avoid carrying out dangerous activities such as oil exploitation in, around and within ecosensitive areas such as lakes, rivers, forests, national parks and others more so because the country isn't ready to manage the consequences of carrying out dangerous activities in those ecosensitive areas.
- (h) Finally, if government fails to implement the above recommendations, the undersigned CSOs shall have no other option but to file a case in court against government and the company for redress.

Thank you.

Signatories:

- Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)
- 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 (CEG)
- African Initiative on Food security and Environment
- Environment Governance Institute (EGI)