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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Kampala, Uganda

**OIL REFINERY CASE HEARING: AFFECTED PEOPLE DECRY ISOLATION AND DISCRIMINATION CAUSED BY POOR RAP IMPLEMENTATION**

The oil refinery-affected people have decried the isolation, discrimination and cultural impacts that they are facing due to government failure to implement commitments it made to the refinery-affected people through the 2012 Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) report for the oil refinery project.

The RAP guided the land acquisition process for Uganda's planned oil refinery. The land acquisition, which started in 2012, affected 1, 221 households and 7,118 people.

While appearing before Lady Justice Cornelia Sabitti during the refinery-affected people's case hearing on February 21, 2020, Mr. Christopher Opio told court that government failure to respect commitments it made in the 2012 RAP had resulted in isolation and discrimination of the oil refinery-affected among other impacts.

Mr. Opio informed court of the above while he was being cross-examined by government's lawyer during the case hearing at the Kampala High Court.

**ISOLATION DUE TO RAP FAILURES**

"Government committed to identify land on a case by case basis for each of the households which opted for physical relocation. The RAP also stated that the oil refinery-affected people would not be put in a special resettlement because it would isolate us from the rest of the community.

However, government resettled the refinery-affected people that opted for physical relocation including me in a camp in Kyakaboga, Hoima contrary to those commitments

In that camp, we are located some distance away from other community members, leading to isolation," Mr. Opio said during and after court.

The isolation has encumbered trade, good social relations, access to credit services due to good relations with the neighbouring communities and others that are needed for the social and economic well-being of the oil refinery-affected people.

Moreover, because some families were broken up due to some family members opting for physical relocation while others opted for cash compensation, the family members are isolated from each other.

Mr. Opio also said during the court case hearing that in addition to being isolated, the oil refinery-affected people are suffering from discrimination.

### **CULTURAL DISTORTIONS**

In addition to the above, Mr. Opio informed court that his community's culture and economic activities were distorted as a result of government failure to implement commitments in the RAP.

"In the camp at Kyakaboga, we do not have enough space for grazing our cattle and other animals," Mr. Opio said.

He further noted that social tensions had increased.

"In the village where I lived before, my immediate neighbour was about 800 metres away which saved us from constant conflicts. In Kyakaboga however, the distance between our houses is two metres and this encourages conflict."

It is noteworthy that the evidence Mr. Opio submitted adds to that submitted by Mr. Innocent Tumwebaze, Mr. John Bosco Wandera and others who have been cross-examined by government's lawyer. The negative impact of the cut-off date of June 2, 2012 through which government stopped the oil refinery-affected people from setting up new developments or cultivating perennial crops on their land before compensation has been especially stressed by the oil refinery-affected people. Mr. Opio talked about this impact too.

## **SCHOOL DROP-OUTS**

“We were informed that we should not use our land for any new development or grow any perennial crops which my family entirely depended on for survival.

We stopped all the activities on the land because government had promised to resettle us within six months which led to loss of income that we used to derive from crops like cassava. We were resettled in 2018, nearly six years after the land acquisition by government started. I dropped out of school for two years because my family lacked an income.

My family also starved because even the little crops that were left on the land were eaten by wild animals as most people had deserted the area and animals invaded the land,” Mr Opio said.

## **NEXT HEARING**

“The evidence that the refinery-affected people have submitted so far is overwhelming. It shows that government failed to implement many commitments it made in the RAP and used the cut-off date in a way that denied the refinery-affected people many of their rights.

The evidence also shows that government failed to pay prompt, fair and adequate compensation. This led to many socio-economic consequences such as school drop-outs, food scarcity, cultural distortions, family breakdowns, gender-based violence and others.

We hope that court will use this evidence to give justice to the refinery-affected people. The people want court to declare that the use of a cut-off date for non-use of the people’s land was unconditional and had grave impacts.

The people also want court to compel government to pay them, fair and adequate compensation among several other prayers.

If justice is served, not only will the oil refinery-affected people get some reprieve from the pain caused by the project, but other project-affected people will also benefit especially through declaration of the unconstitutionality of the way government uses cut-off dates to deprive communities from using their land before compensation,” Ms. Doreen Namara, AFIEGO’s Legal Assistant said after the case hearing.

The presiding judge adjourned the case to May 25, 2020. She hopes to conclude hearing of the case in June 2020.

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**For more information, contact:**

Mr. Innocent Tumwebaze,  
Chairperson, ORRA  
0789-726114

**OR**

Ms Diana Nabiruma  
Senior Communications Officer, AFIEGO  
[dnabiruma@afiego.org](mailto:dnabiruma@afiego.org)  
[0782-280073](tel:0782-280073)

**ABOUT AFIEGO AND ORRA**

**AFIEGO** is a public policy research and advocacy registered non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to influencing energy policies for the common good. AFIEGO promotes rule of law and offers legal services to citizens whose rights are abused in energy projects or processes among others.

**ORRA** is a community-based organisation that brings together oil project-affected communities in the Albertine region to engage various stakeholders for environmental conservation and the protection of oil-affected communities' rights.