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EACOP AND TILENGA PROJECT-AFFECTED PERSONS EXPRESS DISAPPOINTMENT WITH FRENCH COURT DECISION

Households whose land and property were forcefully acquired by French oil major, TotalEnergies, for its Tilenga and East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) projects in Uganda have expressed disappointment with a court ruling issued yesterday by a Paris civil court.

The ruling was made in regards to a court case that six Ugandan and French civil society organisations (CSOs) filed in 2019. Through the case, the CSOs asked that court compels TotalEnergies to put in place adequate mitigation measures to protect people and the environment from the risks posed by its Tilenga and EACOP oil projects in Uganda and Tanzania.

The CSOs that filed the court case include Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO), National Association for Professional Environmentalists (NAPE), Navigators for Development (NAVODA) and Civic Response on Environment and Development (CRED) from Uganda. Others include Friends of the Earth, France and Survie from France.

Households affected by the Tilenga and EACOP projects provided evidence of the human rights violations that they have suffered due to the projects. They had hoped that through its ruling that was made yesterday, court would compel TotalEnergies to right its wrongs by compensating them and putting in place adequate mitigation measures.

Instead, the Paris civil court ruled that the CSOs' legal action was inadmissible because the current claims are "*substantially different from the claims*" made in the initial formal notice sent to Total. The CSOs strongly contest the assertion that their claims have changed as they only provided additional evidence of human rights abuses during the proceedings.

The judgment also states that the CSOs' claims exceed the interim relief judge's competence and should be "*be examined in depth*" by a civil judge following a regular procedure on the merits.

Ms. Hope Arinaitwe, who was displaced for the EACOP project in Hoima district says, "I have eight children and it has been very difficult to provide food for them since I was told in 2019 that my land was going to be taken for the EACOP project. When we were told that our land was going to be taken, Total stopped us from using our land to grow perennial food crops. Total promised to give us food as part of our livelihood restoration but since 2019, I have not received any food.

I now work as a *mumpakasi* [labourer] on people's land to provide food for my children but the food I get is not enough. I have engaged Total's people but no food has come my way. It is not good to make poor women's lives difficult for so called development. Courts should be compelling companies to protect our rights."

Rev. Fred Musimenta says, "We have not received compensation and are not supposed to use our land due to cut-off dates from Total. Our livelihood is threatened and our only hope is that the courts of law can administer justice to stop the human rights abuses perpetrated by these companies."

Mr. John Tundulu, who was forcefully displaced for the Tilenga project in Buliisa district, says, "We have suffered a lot since Total started acquiring our land. Total offered us low compensation, which we rejected. Our land is our life and courts must help us to defend it."

Ms. Janepher Baitwamasa of NAVODA says, "There is no denying that oil exploitation and the infrastructure associated with it have impacted the environment in the Albertine region. Small pockets of 'forests' and streams have been destroyed, making access to firewood and clean water difficult. Today, women have to walk long distances to access firewood and water. This is gendered injustice. If courts don't act fast enough to compel Total to put in place adequate mitigation measures for its projects, this gender injustice will be perpetuated."

Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, AFIEGO's CEO, says, "Despite the setback that we suffered yesterday, we remain hopeful that when our case is heard on its merits, the courts in France will deliver justice. Everyone everywhere must be doing everything to protect communities and the environment in Uganda and Tanzania from oil threats. On our part, we remain committed to seeking justice from courts."

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