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AFIEGO CALLS FOR BASELESS CHARGES AGAINST ITS STAFF TO BE DROPPED

The six Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) staff that were arrested and detained last week on Friday October 22, 2021 reported to police today in fulfillment of their police bond requirements.

The staff were joined by diplomats from the European Union and U.S. embassies.

The six staff, who spent over 72 hours in detention contrary to provisions in the 1995 Uganda Constitution were first detained at Kira Police Station. They were later transferred to Jinja Road Police Station in Kampala. It is from here that they were released on Monday October 25, 2021.

All the staff, who include Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, AFIEGO's CEO, Ms. Rachael Amongin and Ms. Catherine Twongyeirwe, were charged with failure to produce documents. Other staff who were arrested, detained, charged with the aforementioned offence and reported to police today include Mr. Paul Kato, Mr. Patrick Edema and Ms. Mercy Nuwamanya.

Speaking before reporting to police, AFIEGO's CEO, Mr. Kamugisha said, "It is unfortunate that institutions such as police that should be going after real criminals are being used to harass AFIEGO and other human rights defenders who haven't committed any offence.

Before we were arrested and detained on Friday [October 22, 2021], the staff members who had been previously arrested from the Kampala office [on October 13, 2021] were charged with a holding charge of operating without a permit.

On October 14, 2021, our lawyers wrote to the National Bureau for Non-governmental organisations [NGO Bureau] and the Kira Resident State Attorney. They noted that the arrest of the AFIEGO staff was unlawful and in contravention of the law."

AFIEGO is a company limited by guarantee and can sue or be sued. As such, the arrest of AFIEGO staff was unlawful and irregular.

Mr. Kamugisha adds, "The lawyers also noted that the NGO Bureau acted outside its mandate when it tried to halt the activities of AFIEGO, a company limited by guarantee. The NGO Bureau is only empowered to regulate the activities of NGOs."

Speaking about the offence that was preferred against the six AFIEGO staff on October 25, 2021, Ms. Doreen Namara, the compliance and legal assistant at AFIEGO said, “No request to produce any documents were made by the NGO Bureau or any government entity prior to the arrest. The charge on failure to produce documents was quickly made up as security sought to give a reason for unlawfully detaining AFIEGO staff.”

Mr. Kamugisha adds, “Knowing that AFIEGO had committed no offence but seeking to harass AFIEGO to silence our campaigns on protecting Bugoma forest and stopping human as well as environmental abuses under mega oil projects, the arrests happened.

This is most unfortunate. For all citizens’ wellbeing, the work of environmental and human rights defenders should never be criminalised. If environmental and human rights defenders do not speak up, the powerful and communities alike will suffer the consequences of environmental and human rights abuses.”

CONCLUSION

AFIEGO is calling on the NGO Bureau and security agencies to desist from harassing and causing the unlawful arrest of its staff. The baseless charges against AFIEGO staff should also be dropped.

Finally, AFIEGO thanks all its partners who stood with us and did all it took for the release of our staff. Despite the intimidation, AFIEGO remains committed to promoting environmental conservation and the protection of communities’ rights.



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