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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
BULIISA & KAMPALA**

GOV'T SUES 42 HOUSEHOLDS OVER TOTAL'S TILENGA PROJECT

Affected persons ask court to desist from promoting injustices by rushing court processes

The High Court in Hoima is tomorrow (December 8, 2023) expected to hear a court case that Uganda's Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD) filed against 42 households whose land in Buliisa district is being acquired for the Tilenga oil project. The project is operated by TotalEnergies E&P (U) BV.

In the suit that was filed on December 4, 2023 by the Attorney General's office on behalf of the MEMD, the ministry is requesting court for permission to deposit compensation for 16 households with court. The households rejected the compensation on grounds that it is low and unfair. After depositing the compensation in court, the households will be evicted from their land. Total is compulsorily acquiring the land on behalf of the MEMD.

Further, through the suit, the MEMD is seeking to evict 18 households before addressing disputes on the land that the affected households live on. The land is being claimed by other parties. Land grabbing and disputes increased in Buliisa since Total's oil activities commenced in the district.

In addition, the MEMD is seeking to evict Mr. Fred Balikenda's household of six, including a baby, because the household members have refused to be physically relocated before Total compensates them for the damages and loss in income they suffered owing to Total fencing off and isolating the family before compensating the household.

Seven households are also set to lose their land without compensation because Total has failed to identify them.

Mr. Jealousy Mugisa Mulimba, one of the parties that has been sued says, “The case against us was filed at the Hoima High Court on December 4, 2023 and a hearing date was set on December 8, 2023. Some of the 42 households that are being sued were informed of the case against them yesterday [December 6, 2023]. Many remain unaware that a case was instituted against them. Why is the judiciary acting too quickly? Do they want to promote injustices?”

Ms. Aminah Acola, a lawyer that works with Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) says, “Every Ugandan has a right to be given adequate time and opportunity to defend themselves. We expect court to be alive to the fact that most of the households in the case are illiterate, financially constrained and do not understand court processes. They therefore should have been given ample time within which to engage a lawyer and put in a response to the case.”

Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, the CEO of AFIEGO says, “The judiciary is on trial. AFIEGO supported the oil refinery-affected people to file a case against the government of Uganda over low, inadequate and unfair compensation in March 2014. Nearly ten years later, hearing of the case is yet to be concluded. Yet the case filed by the MEMD against 42 poor households is set to be quickly heard. Rushing the case is perhaps aimed at frustrating efforts by the affected people to get a lawyer, and to file the necessary documents before court. This will see the affected persons losing the case.”

Mr. Kamugisha adds, “It should also be known that no law provides that project-affected persons’ compensation can be deposited in court. Despite this, in 2020, government sued nine Tilenga project-affected households who refused low compensation that was being given under Resettlement Action Plan 1. In 2021, the judiciary illegally allowed government to deposit the households’ compensation in court. This set a bad precedent that should never be repeated. It is also sad that government has continued to use and misuse courts to destroy citizens' right to own property and/or get adequate compensation.”

Mr. Frank Muramuzi, the Executive Director of National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) says, “This kind of quick fixing of cases without adequate notice to households has no place in the world. Further, any kind of investments that do not prioritise the rights of project-affected persons are useless and should be fought at all costs.”

Mr. Abdul Musinguzi of Tasha Africa Research Institute says, “The Ministry of Energy’s actions are tainted with ill intentions and are aimed at denying the project-affected persons justice. Lay men should not be ambushed and rushed

to courts without being given adequate time to prepare. The judiciary should avoid being used.”

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