

## Uganda: six staff members of our partner organisation AFIEGO in custody

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23 October 2021 - Yesterday, six staff members of our partner organisation Africa Institute of Energy Governance (AFIEGO), including its director Dickens Kamugisha (1), were arrested in Kampala, Uganda. Afiego is one of four Ugandan organisations involved in several [legal cases against the oil project, including the one against TotalEnergies in France](#) and in the East African Court of Justice.

For several months, AFIEGO has been the target of continuous and increasing pressure and intimidation from the Ugandan authorities, who want to prevent it from continuing its activities against Total's mega-oil project, in defence of the affected communities and the environment. The #StopEacop Alliance and the signatories of this petition (see below), including Friends of the Earth France and Survie, call for their immediate release and ask all international French authorities and organisations to take concrete action to help stop the repeated persecution of human rights defenders in Uganda.

The six AFIEGO staff members arrested yesterday are still being detained at Kiira police station in the Ugandan capital and they are set to be transferred to Jinja, the Uganda Police Headquarters. The police are yet to indicate the charges against them. Among those arrested are a breastfeeding mother and a person in need of medical treatment. These arrests follow the initial arrest and subsequent release on bond of several AFIEGO staff members on 13 October 2021. Last May, the #StopEACOP Alliance together with Friends of the Earth France and Survie had already raised the alarm when [an AFIEGO staff member was arrested in the oil region](#) while accompanying an Italian journalist.

These new arrests are part of a pattern of harassment and persecution of AFIEGO by the Ugandan authorities. Known for its activities in defence of human rights and the environment, notably against Total's mega-oil project, AFIEGO is one of [54 NGOs whose suspension was announced by the NGO Bureau](#) (2) on 20 August, in a context of increasing repression of civil society. The NGO Bureau has no authority over AFIEGO and [there is no legal basis for the suspension](#), as AFIEGO's lawyers told the NGO Bureau.

In recent weeks, pressure against AFIEGO had intensified significantly:

- On 6 October 2021, the police raided AFIEGO's office in Hoima, in the oil region, and arrested a staff member, who was finally released after several hours at the Hoima police station;
- On 7 October 2021, the police raided AFIEGO's office in Buliisa, also in the oil region, ordering it to be closed within in the next two hours, as well as the offices of our partner NAVODA, and the community association ORGHA (Oil and Gas Human Rights Defenders Association). Maxwell Atuhura, the staff member who had been arrested in May, was briefly detained, and a few days later, the association's signposts were vandalised;
- On 14 October 2021, the police arrested and held for 30 hours in custody Mugisa Kahero, chairperson of the community-based organization ORGHA, some of whose members are working with AFIEGO to defend the rights of communities affected by the Tilenga oil project, developed by Total. Mugisa Kahero was arrested again on the morning of Tuesday, 19 October, after reporting to the police station as required when he was released on bond a few days earlier. He was then transferred to Masindi prison to await a hypothetical trial date.

- Yesterday, on 22 October 2021, in Kyotera district, the police arrested and detained Robert Biriye, a human rights defender and member of communities affected by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project developed by Total, who is mobilised to defend land rights. He was released on bond, and is charged with "incitement to violence, sabotage of the government program and unlawful illegal assembly".

In a statement released this morning, AFIEGO said: "*There is a coordinated effort to silence critical voices that speak out against the destruction of the environment and the abuse of oil project-affected communities' rights. (...) The arrest of the AFIEGO staff and their partners is aimed at silencing the organisation and other critical voices*". The association also states: "*In the letter to the NGO Bureau, AFIEGO promised to take legal action against the bureau if the harassment of AFIEGO and its staff was not stopped*".

In April 2020, [four UN Special Rapporteurs had already warned about the situation of human rights defenders in the oil region](#): "*We are further concerned that the harassment of human rights defenders may prevent other Ugandans affected by Total Uganda's oil project from exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression*". [UN Special Rapporteurs sent a new letter](#) to the French and Ugandan governments in July 2021, but to date, there has been no response.

Ten days after the release of their new investigation [How the French State is playing into Total's hands in Uganda](#), Friends of the Earth France and Survie call on President Emmanuel Macron, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Ambassador in Kampala to show that they are willing to stand up for human rights by publicly denouncing the repeated arrests and persecution of human rights defenders mobilised against oil projects, and by taking concrete action to help secure the immediate release, without any charge, of AFIEGO staff members.

**As civil society organizations from Uganda, East Africa, the African region and the whole world, we demand the following of the Ugandan Inspector General of Police, Martin Okoth Ochola:**

1. The immediate release of the 6 AFIEGO staff that have been arrested illegally by the Ugandan police.
2. The bogus charges against some AFIEGO staff members operating without a permit should be dropped.
3. The Ugandan NGO Bureau should stop causing the arrest and interfering in AFIEGO's work.
4. Withdraw the charges against Mr. Robert Biriye, and release Mr. Mugisa Kahero.
5. Cease and desist from any further harassment of AFIEGO and CSOs in Uganda.
6. A public apology issued to the victims of this harassment and their families.

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**Notes :**

- (1) Dickens Kamugisha, director of AFIEGO, came to France twice in 2019 as part of the launch of the France legal case against Total. See his [TV interview on France 24](#).

- (2) The National NGO Bureau (NGO Bureau) is a semi-autonomous administration under the Ugandan Ministry of Internal Affairs. According to [its website](#), it is supposed to "provide an enabling environment for the empowerment of the NGO sector", and is mandated to "register, regulate, monitor, inspect, coordinate and oversee all NGO operations in the country".

To sign on to this petition on the link below:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeM5uODwHv252r\\_MDBgmrFNEwVQOJZfqxfileH-u4hwtaL71g/viewform?usp=sf link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeM5uODwHv252r_MDBgmrFNEwVQOJZfqxfileH-u4hwtaL71g/viewform?usp=sf_link)

**This petition is endorsed by the following organizations:**

1. #StopEACOP Campaign
2. Natural Justice
3. Global Witness
4. [350Africa.org](#)
5. BankTrack
6. Inclusive Development International
7. Avaaz
8. Oilwatch Africa
9. Lawyers' Environmental Action Team (LEAT)
10. Save Virunga
11. deCOALonize Kenya
12. Community Transformation Foundation Network (COTFONE)
13. Mt Kenya Network Forum
14. Actionaid Kenya Activista Laikipia
15. Laudato Si Movement
16. Africa Coal Network
17. ReCommon
18. Lamu women Alliance
19. Centre for Natural Resource Governance
20. Environment Governance Institute
21. Friends of Lake Turkana (FoLT)
22. Save Lamu
23. NGO Survie
24. Just Share NPC
25. groundWork
26. Grassroots Women Initiative Network
27. Jamaa Resource Initiatives
28. Millennium Community Development Initiatives (MCDI)
29. PARAN
30. Both ENDS
31. Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)
32. Pro Natura
33. Friends of the Earth Switzerland
34. IUCN NL
35. Youth concerns on environment and development (YCED)

36. Tiwi sunset
37. Amigos da Terra Brasil
38. FoE Brazil
39. Migori women with disabilities CBO
40. COECOCEIBA
41. Friends of the Earth Costa Rica
42. Les Amis de la Terre Togo
43. Lamu Youth Alliance
44. Environmental Rights Action
45. Friends of the Earth Nigeria
46. FIDEP foundation Ghana
47. Friends of the Earth Europe
48. GreenFaith
49. Ja! Justica Ambiental
50. Agir ensemble pour les droits humains
51. Oregon Interfaith Power & Light
52. Friends with Environment in Development FED
53. Green Creation
54. Tierra Nativa - Amigos de la Tierra Argentina
55. Friends with Environment in Development FED
56. Hope 4 All Interfaith Community
57. Health of Mother Earth Foundation ;
58. GLISS
59. IIngwesi1- Maiyanat community Land
60. Redes Friends of the Earth Uruguay
61. Friends of the Earth International
62. Friends of the earth Germany (BUND)
63. GreenFaith
64. Iuman factor
65. SOBREVIVENCIA, Amigos de la Tierra Paraguay
66. SOS-Forets / UFEM CI
67. Youth For Green Communities (YGC)
68. Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) South Sudan
69. SOBREVIVENCIA,
70. Amigos de la Tierra Paraguay
71. NC Council of Churches
72. Centre for Environmental Justice
73. Women for Green Economy Movement Uganda
74. Mulekyo and co
75. Biogas International Ltd
76. RAPEN
77. Holy Covenant United Church of Christ
78. AFIEGO
79. Alofa Tuvalu
80. Justice Institute Guyana
81. Waste water managers association
82. Bathi Wrua
83. U.S. office of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW)
84. Friends of ZOKA

85. Gallienne
86. Oil Change International
87. Asociación Madre Tierra Honduras
88. Centre d'Excellence du Droit de l'Environnement-CEDE
89. Kituo Cha Sheria Legal Advice Centre
90. CESTA Amigos de la tierra El Salvador
91. The Climate Reality Project, Charlotte Chapter
92. Greenfaith Charlotte
93. Lionel Lee Jr. Center for Wellness
94. Market Forces
95. St Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church Green Team
96. ELAC
97. CENSAT Amigos de la Tierra Colombia
98. Jobard
99. Upholding Life And Nature (ULAN)
100. Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center- Friends of the Earth Philippines
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