



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 10, 2017

Kampala & Hoima

### **REFINERY WOMEN WRITE TO MPs ON “LIFE-THREATENING”, “STRESSFUL” & “DEPRESSING” SITUATION GOVT HAS PUT THEM IN**

#### **Call for solutions to lack of food, education, health centres & burial places**

Women belonging to households whose land was part of the over 29 sq km that was acquired by government more than five years ago for Uganda’s proposed oil refinery in Kabaale-Buseruka Hoima district have written to their Members of Parliament (MPs) and other stakeholders requesting them to find solutions for the “life-threatening”, “stressful” and “depressing” situation in which they are living.

The women, who are part of 83 households that are yet to be relocated by government, are demanding for their immediate relocation, food, restoration of education and health services in addition to reinstatement of their cultural rights and the right to life through their immediate relocation by government.

“There is a lot of hunger in our homes because [since putting a cut-off date of June 2, 2012], government refused us to grow crops such as cassava, bananas, oranges, mangoes, guavas and pawpaws [perennial crops]. With the bad weather conditions that we experienced last year, our crops that were not drought-resistant like cassava were destroyed, leaving us without food.

Government also stopped us from growing income-generating crops such as coffee and tobacco. This has left us without money to buy food for our families,” the women say in a statement that has been translated from Runyoro.

Without food and income, their children have been left to suffer.

“We are suffering too much! Our children keep demanding for food and other basic needs but we cannot provide these needs because we neither have food nor money,” the women say.

Yet food isn’t the only right that their children are being denied.

“Schools such as Nyahaira P/S and Kyapaloni were closed because following compensation, some pupils and teachers relocated to other areas. Without food and teachers, pupils dropped out of school. Moreover, those who finished primary seven and were headed to secondary school could not because we do not have money for school fees. Some of our boys and girls are at home doing nothing and we fear that the girls will become pregnant,” the women say.

The refinery project affected four schools. The project also affected 926 pupils and 1, 344 children under five. Today, over 400 children whose families are yet to be relocated by government are out of school. These children are missing out on the ongoing national identity card registration exercise whose deadline is August 30, 2017. The data captured during the exercise will be used in the issuance of index and registration numbers, reports have noted.

The women note that their cultural rights and the right to life are not being respected.

“The distance to the nearest health centre is too far and with no sources of income, we do not have money to use for transport to the health centres or buy medicine. Our patients have ended up dying yet finding a burial place is a problem,” the women say.

Having valued the refinery-affected people’s property and set a cut-off date of June 2, 2012 after which new property put up including graves would not be compensated, finding alternative burial places for loved ones has been problematic. Four deaths have been experienced as the 83 families await relocation and each death brings with it the pain of burying loved ones in burial grounds forbidden by culture.

The women also note: “Amidst us, we have widows who stay with orphans and have no one to lend them a hand. We also have elderly women and men and there are also people who are HIV positive. The people with HIV are supposed to have a balanced diet but they cannot because they are poor and are not allowed to grow fruits. These people’s lives are in danger because of too much depression, stress and fatigue.”

The refinery project affected 7, 118 people of whom 181 were elderly, 106 were chronically ill and 201 were disabled.

Because of the above stressful and desperate situation, some women have been abandoned by their husbands.

“Our husbands abandoned our homes because there is no food. They now have other women who are taking care of their needs,” the women say.

Over 10 households have also found themselves homeless as their houses collapsed.

**To address their grievances, the women are calling on government to do the following:**

- Relocate their families within one month;
- Return their children to school without further delay;

- Provide food relief and adequate health services;
- Ensure that the resettlement/relocation area has water and electricity in the settlement area;
- Finally, government must follow the recommendations of the refinery project's Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) and avoid forcing them into a camp where their traditional lifestyles will be violated.

\*\*\*\*\*

**ENDS**