

OIL REFINERY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION; NYAKABINGO-BUSERUKA, HOIMA

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Hoima

REFINERY-AFFECTED PEOPLE TO PROTEST OVER MINISTRY OF ENERGY'S FAILURE TO ISSUE THEM WITH LAND TITLES AMIDST ANOTHER DISPLACEMENT

Following the discovery that the land the Ministry of Energy compensated them with is registered in another person's names, the 73 oil refinery-affected households the ministry relocated to Kyakaboga in Hoima are calling on the ministry to issue them with their land titles immediately.

Failure to comply with the above demand will result into men, women and children holding peaceful demonstrations in Hoima and Kampala including camping at the Ministry of Energy's office in Kampala.

“When the Ministry of Energy acquired our land on behalf of government for the oil refinery project, the ministry promised to uphold land acquisition laws including Article 26 of the Uganda Constitution [which provides for payment of fair, adequate and prompt compensation].

In line with Article 26 and through the Resettlement Action Plan [2012] that we were sensitised on, the ministry committed to replace the land and houses of families whose land it acquired and which families opted for relocation. The ministry also committed to provide land titles to the families so that they could have proof of ownership of their land.

However, since 2014 when Ministry of Energy bought our replacement land in Kyakaboga and showed it to us, we have engaged the ministry in every civil way possible but they have not listened. We have had physical meetings and written letters requesting the Ministry of Energy to give us our land titles.

Throughout 2015 to date, we have also engaged institutions such as parliament, the Uganda Human Rights Commission [UHRC], the Hoima district land board in addition to the RDC's office in Hoima to compel the ministry to give us our titles.

However, the land titles have not been issued. Instead, government has only made sweet promises that it has not fulfilled. For instance, during a meeting with the UHRC in Hoima in May 2016, the ministry committed to provide us with our land titles. The year 2016 ended without the titles.

In January 2017, the ministry said that each affected family would be issued with two land titles, with one being for the land on which our houses sit and one for our farmland.

Further, before commissioning of the resettlement in August 2017, the-then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Energy, Dr Stephen Isabalija, said that the land titles were being processed. The ministry even issued a press statement to this effect. This was after we complained about the ministry's failure to issue the land titles.

In January 2018, we were once again promised that we would receive our land titles. The year ended and we did not receive them.

We are tired of empty promises and considering recent events which have left our members disheartened, we can no longer patiently listen to empty promises," the chairperson of the Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA), Mr Innocent Tumwebaze, says.

The recent events that Mr Tumwebaze is alluding to include the fact that seven oil refinery-affected households that were relocated by government to Kyakaboga in 2018 are set to have their land acquired by Total E&P for the oil company to develop feeder pipelines.

"We were first of all very surprised by the fact that Ministry of Energy relocated us to a place that would be affected by another land acquisition. The ministry could have used the Albertine Graben Physical Development Plan to know what areas will be affected by oil activities so that it would not relocate us there.

The ministry did not and we are wondering today: Why would the ministry subject the same group of people to the psychological torture, loss of social networks, loss of economic opportunities and other impacts of displacement within a year of relocating them? Surely, the ministry must have a more humane approach which avoids displacement of the same group of people within at least ten years of their first displacement.

We were also surprised by the fact that when seven of our members participated in a land acquisition disclosure exercise by Total on January 14, 2019 in Hoima, they were told that the title of their and our land is in another person's name.

Who is this person? Most importantly, why doesn't the Ministry of Energy work with the Ministry of Lands to give us our land titles?

Our members were told by Total's sub-contractors, Atacama and Nomads Consults, that they should register as tenants, which means that they will be given less compensation.

Our members rightly refused to participate in this injustice being committed against them by refusing to sign the forms they were given.

To protect them and all the 73 refinery-affected households that were relocated, we are demanding that the Ministry of Energy issues us with our land titles immediately," Mr Christopher Opio, the General Secretary of ORRA says.

The people are also demanding that Ministry of Energy issues them with certificates of occupancy for the houses it constructed for them following government acquiring their land for Uganda's oil refinery beginning in June 2012.

The people say that without the certificates of occupancy, the houses, just like the land they were compensated with do not belong to them.

The people are also demanding for safe water provided by a gravity flow scheme and solar power. Ministry of Energy committed to provide water and electricity to the oil refinery-affected people in the 2012 RAP.

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ABOUT ORRA

The Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA) is an association that brings together the 1, 221 households that were affected by the oil refinery project in Hoima. The association defends its members' rights.

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