

OIL REFINERY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION; KABAAL-BUSERUKA, HOIMA

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OUR CHILDREN HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH: MINISTRY OF ENERGY SHOULD OPEN SCHOOL FOR REFINERY-AFFECTED PUPILS IN KYAKABOGA THIS TERM

Government must open Nyahaira P/S this school term to enable the oil refinery-affected pupils who were relocated to Kyakaboga to return to school, refinery-affected parents have said.

“When the school term opened yesterday on Monday May 28, 2018, parents took their children to Nyahaira P/S. However, the school was not open and they started demonstrating,” Mr Innocent Tumwebaze, the chairperson of the Oil Refinery Residents Association says.

He adds: “Over 200 children that are supposed to be in nursery school and lower primary have not been going to school since families relocated last year. Parents say the young children cannot walk the four to five kilometres to Buseruka P/S, which the older primary school pupils were attending last term.

The older pupils in upper primary were walking but this term, the paths have been overgrown with grass due to the rainy season and are bushy. Parents fear to allow their children to go to school using the bushy paths because they could be attacked by wild animals.

Uganda has also become unsafe with kidnappings being reported day in, day out. Parents yesterday therefore demanded that Nyahaira P/S in Kyakaboga is opened for second term for both the young and older pupils,” Mr Innocent Tumwebaze.

Nyahaira P/S in Kyakaboga was constructed by the Ministry of Energy to replace Nyahaira P/S of Kabaale-Buseruka which was affected by government’s land acquisition of over 29 sq. km for Uganda’s proposed oil refinery.

The school is supposed serve pupils belonging to the over 70 refinery-affected households which were relocated to Kyakaboga in Hoima district by Ministry of Energy. However, because of sub-standard works which are also noted in the 2017 annual report of the Auditor General, the school was rejected by Hoima district.

“Parents say that the ministry of energy has promised for a long time that they would return their children to school. They made promises in 2016 when the

refinery-affected people had a meeting with Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) in May 2016 in Hoima.

The ministry of energy said that they would ensure that children returned to school in 2016. This did not happen. Efforts including meetings with the ministry of energy, MPs and others have not resulted in the opening of the school. We even wrote to the District Education Officer in March as we wanted the school to be opened but nothing happened. The parents are desperate and frustrated,” Mr Tumwebaze says.

When they found out that the parents of the refinery-affected pupils were demonstrating, the Buseruka sub-county L.C. 3 chairperson, Mr Ali Tinkamanyire, and the accounting officer of the sub-county (sub-county chief), Mr Moses Musigunzi, went to Nyahaira P/S, where the demonstration was happening.

“The L.C. 3 chairperson and the sub-county chief told the parents that they should be appreciative that government has constructed for their children a good school. The parents got angry and after listening to them and understanding their grievances, the two leaders agreed that one block of the school is opened so that pupils can start learning.

One classroom was opened today and pupils from primary one to primary three are in school. They are happy. However, the headmistress of the school, Ms Mary Gulyentoda, says that lessons cannot go on because there are no teachers in the school,” Mr Julius Ochokdhogu, a leader of the refinery-affected people says.

In the meeting held yesterday following the demonstration, Mr Tinkamanyire and Mr Musigunzi told the community that Buseruka sub-county would pay for two other teachers to teach the pupils.

“It would be good if the sub-county paid the teachers and the children studied. However, we need our children who are in upper primary to also join the school. The ministry of energy and the ministry of education must work together to ensure that they open the school, post and pay teachers and all our children, including those in upper primary, return to school,” Mr Ochokdhogu says.

Parents of the refinery-affected pupils say that should the ministries of energy and that of education fail to open Nyahaira P/S in Kyakaboga so that their children go to the school this term, they will protest until their cries are heard.

The land acquisition for the oil refinery project affected 926 pupils and 1, 344 children under the age of five. Many of the pupils dropped out of school and many children under five failed to start school because government, through the ministries of energy and that of education, failed to reinstate Nyahaira and

Kyapaloni primary schools in the refinery area when the schools collapsed in 2013.

Today, pupils stay at home while their peers elsewhere attain education.

“Our children also want to work in the oil sector but government is preparing them to be prostitutes and iron bar hitmen because it has refused to provide them with education,” Ms Esther Abigaba, a refinery-affected mother, said in April this year when the refinery-affected met with Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) to discuss challenges the people were facing including that of lack of education and map a way forward.

It will be recalled that through the National Content Policy for the Petroleum Sub-sector, Uganda is promoting the participation of citizens through employment and supplying of goods in and to the oil sector. Oil host communities are supposed to benefit from this arrangement.

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For more information, contact:

Mr Innocent Tumwebaze
+256 (0) 789726114
Chairperson, Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA)

OR
Mr Julius Ochokdhogu
+256 (0) 777314552

ABOUT ORRA

The Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA) is an organisation of families that were affected by the land acquisition for Uganda’s oil refinery. The land acquisition, which was undertaken by government through the ministry of energy, started in June 2012. ORRA, which is based in Kabaale-Buseruka, Hoima, works for the promotion of the refinery-affected people’s human rights.