



July 5, 2024
Kampala, Uganda

STOP OIL DRILLING IN MURCHISON FALLS NATIONAL PARK –UGANDANS & CONGOLESE TELL PRESIDENT MUSEVENI

Today, over 828 civil society organisations (CSOs), oil host community members, small-scale farmers, fisherfolk, tour or travel operators and concerned Ugandans as well as Congolese have petitioned President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni demanding an immediate stop to all oil activities in Murchison Falls National Park.

The petitioners also want the president to stop the planned deployment of a second oil rig in the park.

The petition comes at a time when TotalEnergies is engaging President Museveni to allow the company to deploy a second oil rig in the park.

The engagement follows a protracted fight between Total and the Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU), which has refused to issue permits allowing Total to deploy another drilling rig in the park.

PAU is concerned about the devastating biodiversity impact that a second rig in the park would have, a concern that the petitioners also have.

In their July 5, 2024 petition to President Museveni, the petitioners remind the president that not only is the Murchison Falls Protected Area (MFPA) the largest and one of the oldest in Uganda, but that it is also one of the most important areas for biodiversity conservation in the country.

In 2015, the protected area was home to 144 mammal, 556 bird and 51 reptile species. The area was also home to 51 amphibian and 755 plant species.

The petitioners however informed the president that climate change and poaching among other factors had reduced some of the above species' population, per aerial surveys conducted by biodiversity experts. Oil activities are adding pressure, the petitioners said, citing evidence from a study that is to be published by Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) this month (July 2024).

“Oil drilling in the park is having catastrophic impacts on especially elephants, which are sensitive to vibrations from the rig. The elephants are increasingly moving away from the park, and into communities where they have caused deaths and immense loss of crops,” the petition reads.

Oil drilling in the park commenced in June 2023, though commercial oil production is yet to commence.

The petitioners further informed the president that the Tilenga project, which is named after the bushbuck (Engabi), had increased the human population in the park, which threatens the conservation of the nervous and shy bushbuck, not to mention other types of bucks.

The oil roads in the park were also cited as a concern, with the petitioners indicating that the roads had resulted in complaints by tourists who argue that the roads and other infrastructure make parts of the park feel like an industrial area, and not a nature reserve.

“It will be recalled that Murchison Falls National Park was Uganda’s most visited park between 2019 and 2023. In 2023, the park received 141,335 visitors, equivalent to 36.4% of the 387,914 tourists that visited Uganda’s ten national parks. Further, in 2022, the park received 146,649 visitors, accounting for 39.8% of the 367,869 tourists that visited Uganda’s national parks. Endangering biodiversity in the park endangers the livelihoods of the 14.7% of Uganda’s labourforce that are employed in the tourism sector,” the petitioners say.

The endangerment of conservation of the Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar site by construction of an oil pipeline that is affecting the Ramsar site was also cited as risking Uganda’s multi-million-dollar fishing industry, not to mention fishing livelihoods. The pipeline also risks the livelihoods of Congolese fisherfolk that rely on Lake Albert to make a living. The Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar site is an important spawning ground for the Lake Albert fisheries.

The petition calls for:

1. Immediate halt to all oil activities in Murchison Falls National Park.
2. Rejection of TotalEnergies' proposal to deploy a second oil rig in the park.
3. Compensation for communities affected by human-wildlife conflicts resulting from oil activities.

The petitioners warn that continued oil exploitation in the park will have far-reaching consequences, including:

- Irreversible damage to biodiversity and ecosystems.
- Loss of tourism revenue, a critical source of income for Uganda.
- Increased human-wildlife conflicts, putting both people and wildlife at risk.
- Threats to the livelihoods of communities, Ugandans and Congolese that are dependent on the park's resources.

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