



Marseille, September 09, 2021

Dr Bruno Oberle
Director general

IUCN World Headquarters
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland - Switzerland

[Open letter : IUCN should make a public statement and put in place an ad hoc group on the Tilenga/Kingfisher/EACOP oil projects](#)

Dear Dr Oberle,

We are respectfully writing to you to call your attention to a grave situation that requires urgent action in order to avoid further preventable damage to our Common Home. We are seeking your support to help stop the massive [Lake Albert oil project](#) in Uganda and Tanzania and safeguard the promise of a sustainable future in the heart of Africa.

The Lake Albert project is located in the ecosensitive and biodiverse Albertine Rift in Uganda. It consists of the upstream Tilenga and Kingfisher oil projects as well as the planned East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). The project is being developed by France's TotalEnergies, China's China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) as well as the Ugandan and Tanzanian governments. We hope that you can help us avoid the preventable ecological tragedy posed by the Lake Albert oil project (Tilenga/Kingfisher/EACOP) and ensure that the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters takes precedence over profits.

At this moment, humanity is at a crossroads. Our actions or inaction today will have lasting effects for centuries to come. United in solidarity with the most vulnerable, we Catholics and other people of faith in solidarity with secular international and local organisations and overall civil society observing the arbitrariness of TotalEnergies and its partners, especially in a year when the UN dedicated the next decade for ecosystem restoration, we implore you to take urgent action in line with the science for all of Creation.

Faith-based organisations across the world have worked together this year to initiate [the Healthy Planet, Healthy People Petition](#) so that the political leaders participating in COP26 in Glasgow take action for all of Creation. This comes against the background of the two environmental crises that we are facing on earth: biodiversity loss and climate change. In the past five years, the Catholic community has been very active in reversing the financial flows from the fossil fuel industry by divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment into new clean energy and technologies that don't harm the environment. In the past years, 254 Catholic institutions divested from fossil fuels.

It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. According to the recently-released [IPCC report](#), as humanity, we risk climate change spiralling out of control. Ending investment in fossil fuels and fossil fuel infrastructure is absolutely critical to help us avoid further massive losses and damages in the nearest future.

Global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century under all emissions scenarios considered. Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur soon. Importantly, the goals of the historic Paris Climate Agreement are still within reach. We need to act boldly and ambitiously together and make no more biodiversity loss achievable.

Scientific reports and research state that **a third of oil reserves, half of gas reserves and over 80% of current coal reserves need to remain in the ground in order to avoid catastrophic climate change.** The report of the International Energy Agency (IEA) “Net Zero by 2050 Roadmap” released this year in May stated that **no new investments in fossil fuels should be made further; there also should not be any new oil and gas fields approved for development and no new coal mines or mine extensions are required.** The recent IPCC report alarmingly tells us that we have about one decade left to dramatically decrease our carbon pollution if we want to avoid tragic and irreversible climate change and less than five years to put up the energy infrastructure to facilitate the transition to green energy that would help forestall that.

Put plainly, **there has never been a worse time to develop the Lake Albert oil project (Tilenga/Kingfisher) and to build the world’s largest heated crude oil pipeline, the EACOP,** so that we can burn up to 1.7 billion barrels of oil and generate over 34.3 million extra tons of carbon emissions each year. **The world simply cannot afford another massive oil project like the Tilenga/Kingfisher/EACOP one.**

ABOUT THE EACOP

The EACOP is a proposed 1,443-kilometer pipeline that will transport oil from Hoima in Uganda to the port of Tanga in Tanzania. If completed, it will be the longest heated crude oil pipeline in the world. Extraction of 1.7 billion barrels is threatening to take place at two oil fields: the Kingfisher field, operated by CNOOC Ltd, and the Tilenga field, operated by TotalEnergies. The EACOP, which is slated to be operationalised in 2025, is expected to transport 216,000 barrels of oil per day at peak production.

Both the extraction sites and the EACOP pose serious and severe environmental and social risks to protected wildlife areas, water sources and communities throughout Uganda and Tanzania.

EACOP/TILENGA RISKS

Extraction at the Tilenga oil fields in the Albertine Graben will directly impact Murchison Falls National Park, posing a serious threat to biodiversity and rare and endangered species (see red list species impacted attached). Moreover, [important tributaries](#) of the Nile flow nearby.

Further, according to [WWF and CSCO Uganda](#), more than 500 square kilometers of habitat for African elephants and Eastern Chimpanzees—species considered endangered by IUCN, and which have already disappeared in several African countries— will be severely degraded by the construction of the EACOP. Approximately 1,950 km² of IUCN Category IV protected areas and key biodiversity areas combined will be cleared for the pipeline.

[Commenting on the EACOP project](#), world-renowned environmentalist, author and 350.org Co-founder Bill McKibben said, “The proposed route looks almost as if it were drawn to endanger as many animals as possible.”

It is notable that nearly a third of the pipeline would also traverse through the Lake Victoria basin, Africa's largest lake and a source of the Nile. This has put the lake at risk of oil pollution [The danger of oil leaks into the lake is increased by the risk of earthquakes](#). The pipeline will also cross more than 200 rivers and thousands of farms before reaching the Indian Ocean — where its version of the Exxon Valdez disaster would pour crude oil into some of Africa's most biodiverse mangroves and coral reefs.

Needless to say, the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP projects' environmental, biodiversity, climate change and social risks have raised serious concern. This massive concern about the project by international panelists and personalities is not unfounded; local groups and communities have also expressed their concerns regarding the impact the project will have on their lives, speaking up despite promises of compensation and employment.

Though the Lake Albert project including the EACOP is still under development, human rights violations against communities, particularly from resettlement, [have already been documented](#). So has intimidation and repression against local activists. [More than 100, 000 people](#) have been affected by the compulsory land acquisition for the Tilenga and EACOP projects. The people wait for years before receiving their compensation, leading to human rights violations.

For instance, the EACOP-affected households have waited for their compensation since 2018/2019 and they are yet to be paid to date. This is not only against Ugandan laws, but international best practices as well. When payment of compensation to communities is delayed, the payment often loses value. In practice communities are then often unable to acquire new assets (land) of equivalent value.

Moreover, the use of cut-off dates through which the Lake Albert oil-affected communities are stopped from using their land for key economic purposes such as growing perennial food and cash crops has negative impacts. For instance, the Tilenga/EACOP oil-affected households have suffered food insecurity and loss of family incomes due to the practice of stopping them from fully and productively using their land before compensation. Moreover, with reduced incomes, families are unable to take their children to school, with girls being most affected.

As such, the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP projects are facing significant local community and civil society resistance. Notably, a coalition of over 40 international and local civil society organizations called [STOP-EACOP](#) has been formed to elevate the local communities' concerns and put a stop to the EACOP and its twin upstream Tilenga and Kingfisher oil projects that stand to be climate change catalysts.

Despite Total's claims of its "commitment to implement action plans designed to produce a net positive impact on biodiversity in the development of these projects" as well bring development to local communities, the series of events that have unfolded so far show that this project is unsustainable both for people and the environment.

[The Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP projects expose starkly the problem of climate injustice and inequity.](#)

As Pope Francis states in the Laudato Si' Encyclical, *"this inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations. A true "ecological debt" exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time. [...] We note that often the businesses which operate this way are multinationals. They do here what they would never do in developed countries or the so-called first world. Generally, after ceasing their activity and withdrawing, they leave behind great human and environmental liabilities such as unemployment, abandoned towns, the depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, the impoverishment of agriculture and local stock breeding, open pits, riven hills, polluted rivers and a handful of social works which are no longer sustainable"*.

Not only will the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP oil projects devastate communities, endanger wildlife and further heat the planet, it is also economically reckless (for the region, the world, and investors). The projects are not compatible with a future where the world has redirected its investments into renewable energy.

As [it has been established](#) that the burning of fossil fuels is a major contributor to global warming (in 2018, 89% of global CO2 emissions came from the fossil fuels industry), **it is our responsibility to transition to renewable sources of energy as quickly as possible. Investing in new fossil fuel supply infrastructure like Tilenga/Kingfisher/EACOP means betting on the world not reaching the Paris agreement goal.** We simply cannot support new fossil fuel projects and still expect to mitigate climate change.

A CALL TO INVEST IN GREEN ALTERNATIVES

It is estimated that **the world spends less than \$90 billion a year on conservation and nature protection. In comparison, governments spend more than \$5 trillion every year on subsidies for fossil fuels.** In Uganda's case, tourism contributes 7.7% of the country's GDP but accounts for less than 1% of the annual budget. This, despite the fact that investing in renewable energy, tourism, small-scale agriculture, fishing and reforestation programs will provide [nearly four million](#) jobs to local communities, boost Uganda's GDP [by 10%](#), and provide a cleaner environment which will benefit the whole world.

We need deeper investment in the great potential of the tourism and other green economic sectors, which are currently threatened by the Tilenga/Kingfisher/EACOP projects. Investment in tourism and other green economic sectors could expand Uganda's economy in a sustainable and inclusive manner. This could bring significant environmental, economic and social benefits in return to all.

OUR DEMANDS TO THE IUCN

As a movement united in solidarity for our common home, we come to you, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), to *Unite with us for Life and Livelihoods*. We call on you to help send a strong message to say that we must act on the recommendations of the IPCC and the IEA, and that countries of the Global South must not be pushed into investments that do not serve their people.

The new corporate colonialism of extracting as much profit as possible – while externalizing the human and ecological costs – must end. **The disappearance of biodiversity and encroachment of critical ecosystems such as IUCN designated areas cannot go unnoticed anymore. It is time for IUCN to take a bold stand.**

We call on you to help stop the Tilenga/Kingfisher/EACOP project and safeguard the promise of a sustainable future in the heart of Africa. To this end, we ask you to:

1. Adopt and publicly declare as soon as possible an IUCN position to oppose the Tilenga/Kingfisher/EACOP project and in support of biodiversity protection in Uganda and Tanzania.
2. Engage with the governments of Uganda and of Tanzania to promote a biodiversity protection policy, to replace the current destructive policy.
3. Create an ad hoc working group to follow through on the above.
4. Invite the [Stop EACOP coalition](#) representatives to brief the ad hoc group on an ongoing basis.

We sincerely hope that IUCN will help usher in "a new era of environmentally sound economic development" where social and ecological justice reigns supreme; where the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters and our common home takes precedence over profits.

Together we can co-create a unique precedent where nature is over profit. This can inspire many frontline communities to seek and find environmental and climate justice globally and internationally.

In prayer and solidarity,

Tomas Insua
Executive director
Laudato Si' Movement

Endorsement By:

- Bank Track (Netherlands)
- Save Virunga (Netherlands)
- Innovation Pour le Développement et la protection de l'Environnement (DRC)
- Community Transformation Foundation Network (Uganda)
- Urgewald (Germany)
- Corporate Europe Observatory (Belgium)
- deCOALonize (Kenya)
- Friends of Lake Turkana (Kenya)
- Rainforest Rescue/Rettet Den Regenwald (Germany)
- Association For Conservation of Bugoma Forest (ACBF)- (Uganda)
- Just Share (South Africa)
- Green Climate Campaign Africa (Uganda)
- Environment Governance Institute (Uganda)
- Africa Institute of Energy Governance-AFIEGO (Uganda)
- CCFD-Terre Solidaire (France)
- Forum des Engagés pour le Développement Durable-FORED (DRC)
- Forum Global des Chercheurs des Alternatives-FGCA (DRC)
- Justus Plus-JP (DRC)
- Innovation pour le Développement et la Protection de l'Environnement-IDPE (DRC)
- Association des Filles Mères-AFM (DRC)
- Organisation de la santé pour le développement-OSD (DRC)
- Mamans pour la Lutte contre les Traumatismes-ALAMUT (DRC)
- Bureau de Développement Communautaire-BDC (DRC)
- Association Coopérative Vie Future-ACOOVF (DRC)

- Action Humanitaire pour le Développement Durable-AHDD (DRC)
- Charity Distressed Children-CDC (DRC)
- World Peace Protection-WPP (DRC)
- Fondation de l'Est des jeunes entrepreneurs du Congo-FEJEC (DRC)
- Fédération des Comités des Pêcheurs Individuels du Lac Edouard-FECOPEILE (DRC)
- Fédération des comités de pêcheurs du lac Albert-FECOPEL (DRC)
- Leave It In the Ground (Germany)
- Price Of Oil (Swaziland)
- Price Of Oil (USA)
- Women For Green Economy Movement-WoGEM (Uganda)
- Milieudefensie-Friends of the Earth (Netherlands)
- Strong Roots Congo (DRC)
- Andy Gheorghiu Consulting
- SJDDH (DRC)
- SORADEC (DRC)

Annex

Murchison Falls National Park's red list species impacted:

Scientific name	Common name	Year	Class_name	Red List status
<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>	Hooded vulture	2016	AVES	Critically endangered
<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>	Rüppel's vulture	2016	AVES	Critically endangered
<i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>	White headed vulture	2015	AVES	Critically endangered
<i>Gyps africanus</i>	White-backed vulture	2016	AVES	Critically endangered
<i>Pan troglodytes</i>	Chimpanzee	2016	MAMMALIA	Endangered
<i>Ptilopachus nahani</i>	Nahan's partridge	2004	AVES	Endangered
<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>	Lappet-faced vulture	2016	AVES	Endangered
<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Steppe eagle	1999	AVES	Endangered
<i>Balearica regulorum</i>	Grey-crowned crane	2013	AVES	Endangered
<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>	Grey parrot	2012	AVES	Endangered
<i>Ardeola idae</i>	Madagascar pond heron	2010	AVES	Endangered
<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Hippo	2008	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	African elephant	1996	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Panthera leo</i>	Lion	2016	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	Giraffe	2016	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Leopard	2016	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Caracal aurata</i>	African golden cat	2015	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Phataginus tricuspis</i>	White-bellied pangolin	2014	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Smutsia temminckii</i>	Temminck's pangolin	2014	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Smutsia gigantea</i>	Giant ground pangolin	2014	MAMMALIA	Vulnerable
<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>	Martial eagle	2013	AVES	Vulnerable
<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>	Secretarybird	2006	AVES	Vulnerable
<i>Calamonastides gracilirostris</i>	Papyrus yellow warbler	2016	AVES	Vulnerable
<i>Balaeniceps rex</i>	Shoebill	2014	AVES	Vulnerable