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Uganda: CSOs Petition Museveni to Open up the Oil Sector

By Edward Ssekika

A group of civil society organisations have launched an online campaign collecting signatures to petition President Yoweri Museveni to open up the extractives sector to measures of transparency.

The campaign, dubbed 'End Oil Secrecy: Join EITI', was launched at Kampala Serena hotel last week. The civil society organisations behind the campaign include: ActionAid Uganda (AAU), Global Rights Alert (GRA), SEATINI, Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) and Transparency International Uganda (TIU), among others.

Winfred Ngabiirwe, the executive director of Global Rights Alert, said the campaign is meant to implore government to sign up to Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

EITI is a global transparency and accountability mechanism, where oil and mining companies publish what they have paid to governments and governments, in turn, publish how much they have received from oil companies.

This arrangement, CSOs argue, arms citizens and other stakeholders with relevant information to put government to account and monitor whether money from oil, gas and minerals is put to proper use.

"In this campaign, we seek to encourage government to substantially commit itself to improve transparency and information sharing in regards to the country's oil and mineral resources. We would also like government to make binding commitment by agreeing to take tangible steps to better involve the citizens in the development of the oil and gas sector," Ngabiirwe explained.

The campaign is expected to last for three months and CSOs hope to collect at least 100,000 signatures online. According to the online platform, whoever signs online his or her petition is directly received by the Office of the President.

In the 2008 National Oil and Gas Policy, government committed itself to ensuring transparency in the oil sector. However, this commitment has largely remained on paper.

Currently, at least 49 countries globally have signed to EITI. Arthur Larok, the executive director, ActionAid Uganda, said the petition was directly addressed to President Yoweri Museveni because he is the biggest decision-maker in the country.

"We need a political will to implement the commitment," he said. "EITI will allow us to get much more information than what the Public Finance and Accountability Act is providing," he said.

Uganda needs to go through four major steps before it can officially become an EITI candidate. First, it has to make an unequivocal public statement on its intention to join EITI, then appoint a senior government official to lead the process, appoint a multi-stakeholders group comprised of government representatives, civil society, oil companies and other stakeholders' representatives to man the process, and finally develop a work-plan until the country becomes EITI compliant.

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