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Court adjourns hearing on student activists who participated in #StopEACOP march

KAMPALA, UGANDA - April 26th, 2023 - The Buganda Chief Magistrate Court adjourned the hearing of a case filed by the Ugandan government against university student activists who participated in a peaceful march against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) after the prosecutor failed to appear in court for the hearing.

The court sat at exactly 9 am on 26th April, but the Chief Magistrate adjourned the matter to 10 July 2023 due to the absence of the prosecution. The Chief Magistrate also issued criminal summons to three students who arrived late for the hearing.

Youth for Green Communities (YGC) and activists from the StopEACOP campaign are urging the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) to drop the charges against the student activists who were arrested and charged with a common nuisance offence linked to investments towards the controversial EACOP and other oil projects in Uganda.

The students were arrested on 4th October 2022 during a march to the European Union offices in Kampala, Uganda, to deliver a petition supporting the European Parliament resolution to halt the pipeline.

The YGC and the StopEACOP campaign members, including the student activists, are demoralised by the continued adjournment and delays in this case caused by the prosecution team.

“The office of the DPP and judiciary have failed the test today. The Ugandan constitution gives its citizens protection of freedom of conscience, religion, assembly and association as enshrined under Article 29. It is absurd that in this era, students cannot express their opinions and views in the development they desire. Despite the arrest and judicial harassment of these students, it’s encouraging that we have brave young people who insist on participating in the development they want. We demand the DPP withdraw this case.” **Brighton Aryampa, YGC CEO, said.**

"It is very frustrating going to court for every hearing session, but the matter is adjourned under the pretext that the state prosecutor is still gathering evidence that will incriminate us. Besides fearing that we could be imprisoned for expressing our opinions regarding the EACOP project, it is expensive to go to court since we do not work. Most students miss lectures on the hearing dates because they turn up to court early in the morning, but the court proceedings usually begin over an hour late. We plead with the court to withdraw the criminal summons issued to the three late students." **Lubega Nsamba, one of the nine students arrested and part of the ongoing case, said.**

"The case is unnecessary persecution of defenders of planet earth and healthy climate threatened by dirty and poisonous fossil fuel projects like EACOP. It manifests double standards since EACOP critics are jailed when they demonstrate, while its praise singers receive flowers, money and handshakes from the government when they demonstrate." **Human Rights Lawyer and Environmental Shield CEO Eron Kiiza said.**

"We stand in solidarity with the brave student activists who have been unjustly charged for peacefully standing up for the protection of the environment and the rights and wellbeing of communities in Uganda. While the continued adjournment of this case is disappointing, the unyielding strength and commitment of these young people, and countless others like them, only strengthens our resolve to fight against the dangerous EACOP pipeline and other harmful oil projects in Uganda and worldwide. We call on the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to drop these baseless charges and respect the right to peaceful protest as enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution." **StopEACOP Campaign Coordinator, Zaki Mamdoo said.**

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