



Uganda: Ensure Genuine Community-Led Governance of Lake Landing Sites Protect Indigenous Fishing Communities from Exploitative Oil and Gas Industry Influence

(Kampala, January 1st, 2026) — The December 26 [directive](#) by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni to dissolve abusive lake landing site committees and form new committees with representatives from indigenous fishing communities must embed transparency, accountability, and community-led decision-making, Climate Rights International and the [Environment Governance Institute Uganda](#) said today. President Museveni issued his directive in advance of national elections scheduled for January 15, 2026, after similar calls from [civil society](#) groups and the [opposition](#) led by presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi, popularly known as Bobi Wine.

Fisheries are central to the culture, food security, and livelihoods of millions of Ugandans. Uganda's lakes—including Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, and Lake Kyoga—are vital ecosystems that support more than 1.3 million people directly employed across fishing and fish value chains, and over 7 million who depend on these waters for their daily sustenance. The fisheries sector is among the country's most vital sources of foreign exchange earnings and plays a crucial role in rural food systems. Fishing communities around Uganda's lakes face severe environmental pressures, human rights abuses, and market volatility as the result of major oil and gas exploration and drilling operations led by TotalEnergies and the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), Climate Rights International and the Environmental Governance Institute said.

“We welcome the government's announcement to disband the Fisheries Protection Unit and all landing site committees on Uganda's lakes, but this must lead to an end to abuses and genuine community-led decision making or it will just amount to a pre-election stunt,” said Samuel Okulony, Director of the Environment Governance Institute. “For too long, these units have operated with impunity, causing deep harm to indigenous fishing communities who have depended on these waters for generations. To show the announcement was not just a stunt, these committees should be formed within 15 days, not three months.”

In October 2025, Climate Rights International and the Environment Governance Institute published a [report](#) documenting how people living in and near the area of Uganda's Kingfisher oil project along Lake Albert face military-compelled payments by fisherfolk to be allowed to operate and faced arrest or confiscation of boats if they refused. Kingfisher is operated by the CNOOC and jointly owned by CNOOC, Total Energies, and the Ugandan National Oil Corporation (UNOC). Climate Rights International and the Environment Governance

Institute [wrote](#) to CNOOC outlining the allegations made by residents of the Kingfisher project area but received no reply.

In September 2024, Climate Rights International published a 156-page [report](#) documenting how large-scale oil and gas development in Uganda has been accompanied by serious human rights concerns. The research found that affected communities faced coercive land acquisition practices, inadequate and delayed compensation, intimidation of critics, and restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. In multiple cases, community members reported pressure to accept compensation under threat of project delays, loss of livelihoods, or state intervention, while those who raised concerns about land rights or environmental impacts faced harassment and reprisals. These abuses underscore how extractive-sector investments, when not governed by strict human rights safeguards, can exacerbate existing inequalities and weaken community control over land and resources. Climate Rights International wrote to CNOOC but did not receive a response.

The government has proposed that investors, such as Total Energies and CNOOC, should be members of the new committees.

“The Presidency, Parliament, civil society, and all stakeholders must ensure that the new committees are truly representative, transparent, accountable, and rooted in the needs and voices of the indigenous fishing communities,” said Okulony. “Allowing investors, including those from oil and gas or other sectors, to be members of the committees would likely further undermine customary land and water rights, erode cultural practices tied to fishing, and silence community dissent. Investors should not be members of the committee, since they will pursue their narrow, profit-driven interests.”

Climate Rights International and Environmental Governance Institute urged the Ugandan government to learn lessons from the Kingfisher project by embedding enforceable human rights standards, genuine community consent, and independent oversight at the heart of all new landing site governance structures. These challenges, as highlighted by fishing communities themselves, must be addressed with greater community agency and structural safeguards. Climate Rights International and Environmental Governance Institute called on the government of Uganda to:

- Ensure that the formation of new landing site committees is led by transparent, community-ratified processes that reflect the diverse voices of indigenous fishing populations.
- Establish binding safeguards that protect community land rights, cultural heritage, and environmental integrity against any form of undue investor influence.
- Support capacity-building for community representatives, including training in governance, negotiation, and rights protection, to enable effective participation on equal footing with private sector actors.
- Guarantee that all agreements with investors are publicly disclosed and subject to independent review and community consent.

Remove the military, which is responsible for most of the human rights abuses, from operations at or near the landing sites and ensure that law enforcement responsibilities are conducted by the respective police unit.

“Human rights abuses against fisherfolk and other local residents are rife in and around the lakes where oil and gas operations have been undertaken,” said Brad Adams, Executive Director at Climate Rights International. “Without clear protections, the inclusion of powerful investors, particularly from the oil and gas sector, risks reproducing the same patterns of economic coercion, elite capture, and marginalization of indigenous and small-scale livelihoods that we have documented in extractive project areas. The new committee structure should ensure that the voices of indigenous fisherfolk are not just present but decisive in governance processes.”

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