

1 June 2021

## Uganda: Arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender Maxwell Atuhura

On 25 May 2021, human rights defender **Maxwell Atuhura** was arrested alongside Italian journalist **Federica Marsi** in Buliisa. The two were waiting at a hotel in Buliisa to interview residents of Buliisa affected by the oil extraction activities in their village, when they were arrested. Federica Marsi was released on the same day while Maxwell Atuhura was detained for 2 and a half days.

[Maxwell Atuhura](#) is a human rights defender and the regional head of activities in Buliisa for the Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO). AFIEGO is a legally registered organization established in 2007 that works to promote good energy governance and environmental rights in Uganda.

On 25 May 2021, Maxwell Atuhura and Federica Marsi were waiting to interview a project-affected person in a hotel in Buliisa when they were arrested by police officers and taken to the Buliisa Police Station where Maxwell Atuhura spent the night. Federica Marsi was released on the same day, on the condition that she returned to Kampala. Meanwhile the human rights defender was transferred to the Hoima Central Police station on 26 May. Maxwell Atuhura has not been charged with any offence and has had limited access to his lawyers and family. Prior to their arrest, Maxwell Atuhura and Federica Marsi had been conducting interviews with community members whose land is being acquired or has been acquired for the Tilenga oil project in Buliisa district. Upon inquiring and speaking with officers in charge of the case, a colleague of the human rights defender and his lawyers were asked by the authorities why Maxwell Atuhura and AFIEGO were “undermining oil development”.

On 27 May 2021, Maxwell Atuhura was released on police bond after being detained past the legal 48 hours without being brought before court as provided by Ugandan law. The human rights defender is required to report back to the Hoima Regional Police on 2 June 2021 as part of his bond release. The charge levied against him is 'unlawful assembly'.

Front Line Defender condemns the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender Maxwell Atuhura and believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work defending human rights.

### Front Line urges the authorities of Uganda to:

1. Immediately cease all further harassment of Maxwell Atuhura, as Front Line believes that the arrest and charges are solely as a result of his legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally drop the charges against Maxwell Atuhura, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Uganda, including those like Maxwell Atuhura, who are working on the rights of communities affected by the oil extraction activities, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.