Association of Uganda
Tour Operators Ltd

June 10, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PLANNED CONSTRUCTION OF HYDROPOWER DAM OVER THE MURCHISON FALLS

The Association of Uganda Tour Operators is Uganda's leading and only recognized tourism association representing the interests of the country's registered, professional and most trusted tour companies; founded in 1995.

Reference is made to the advert in the New Vision by the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) on June 7, 2019 in which they announced a notice of intended application for a license from Bonang Power and Energy (Pty) Limited who are intending to construct a hydropower dam near the Murchison Falls in Kiryandongo and Nwoya districts.

On behalf of the Board, Management and entire membership of the Association of Uganda Tour Operators (AUTO) we condemn the construction of this hydropower dam which would only further undermine the efforts by tour operators and other tourism stakeholders to market the country and attract visitors to Uganda, and such acts of wickedness disregard the fact that many tourists come to Uganda, mainly for its nature.

Murchison Waterfalls from the top all the way to the delta at its confluence with Lake Albert including Uhuru Falls, is a Ramsar site, designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; an intergovernmental environmental treaty established in 1971 by UNESCO, which Uganda is also signatory to.

His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni the President of the Republic of Uganda has numerous times mentioned that we have more electricity than we are consuming and surplus is increasing. This cannot be the time to trade-off a natural wonder of the world for an electricity dam.

The tourism sector was earmarked by Government of Uganda as one of the five (5) key-growth sectors for the country’s economy in the National Development Plan II. For the same Government to go against its word and destroy this sector which attracts the largest foreign exchange is to act selfishly, and out of interest of Ugandans.

The Tourism Sector Annual Performance Report FY 2017-2018 shows that over the past 10 years, the tourist arrivals into Uganda have steadily increased from 850,000 in 2008 to over 1.4 million arrivals in
2017. In 2017, Tourism continued to be the leading foreign exchange earner to the Ugandan economy by generating USD 1,453 billion compared to USD 1,371 billion in 2016.

The direct contribution of tourism in Uganda is measured in form of GDP contribution of 10% as well as the direct employment mainly for women and youth in hotels, tour companies, travel agencies, airlines and other passenger transportation services. It is also measured indirectly in terms of the different stakeholders who indirectly benefit from it from being positioned along its varied value chain.

According to the statistical bulletin of the Ministry of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities, Murchison Falls National Park received an increase of 10% over a period of 12 months, commanding up to 31.4% of all Uganda’s park visitations and leading all the 10 national parks in visitor numbers.

It is therefore to cause loss to Ugandan tourism business owners (tour operators, lodge owners and others) and many Ugandans who both directly and indirectly depend on the Murchison Falls for employment and their livelihood. It is also to deprive Ugandans today and in the future of the much needed government revenue, GDP contribution, job creation, and all other benefits that accrue from Sustainable Tourism Development.

Our prayers:

1. We request H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni to publicly pronounce an immediate termination to this damaging project.
2. We request Government of Uganda to launch a nationwide sensitisation on the importance of conservation to the future of Uganda, starting with top officials in the public sector.
3. We request Government of Uganda to dedicate more finances towards to the conservation, sustainable development and promotion of the country’s varied tourist attractions.
4. Since this matter has greatly stressed and caused a lot of anxiety among the tourism business community, stakeholders and the youth employed therein, who are also pressurizing us to hold peaceful demonstrations around the country; we will have no option but to proceed as they demand, should we not hear from Government about our prayers within 2 weeks from today.

We have also served the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) with an objection in light of the same.

END

BOARD, MANAGEMENT & MEMBERSHIP