



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Appropriations Legislation Delivers Victory for Vulnerable Communities

WASHINGTON, DC, Dec. 22, 2014—On Tuesday, December 16, 2014, President Obama signed the FY2015 Omnibus Appropriations bill[1] into law, securing a victory for communities in Liberia and environmental and human rights advocates. The law includes provisions in an explanatory statement that hold the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) accountable for its role in a failed energy project in Liberia, which resulted in serious human rights, labor and environmental abuses. The federal agency approved over US\$200 million in financing for the project, operated by Buchanan Renewables.

The provisions are a response to an independent investigation report[2] that OPIC released in September 2014, following a January 2014 complaint by hundreds of Liberians demanding accountability for widespread abuses associated with the project.[3] The 102-page report revealed institutional failures and accountability gaps at the agency and included extensive recommendations to prevent future harm. Concerned with the findings in the report, Congress attached the explanatory statement's provisions[4] to the Appropriations bill which increase federal oversight of OPIC's operations and require the agency to report to Congress within 90 days on its plan to implement the report's recommendations.

“Although we are pleased that policymakers in Washington are taking steps to address the troubling findings in the report, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Liberians were harmed by this project and their injuries have not yet been redressed,” commented Alfred Brownell of Green Advocates International, a Liberian organization representing victims. “We are hopeful that these institutional changes at OPIC will bring forth greater accountability and transparency, so that other communities will not suffer the harms experienced in Liberia,” expressed his colleague, Francis Colee.

“We called on policymakers in Washington to act and they responded,” stated Kindra Mohr of Accountability Counsel, a legal organization working with the Liberians. “Although we are disappointed that the legislation does not address the issue of remedy, this is a victory that will help protect other vulnerable communities. We expect that Congress will remain engaged in ensuring that OPIC meaningfully responds to this mandate and fully implements the report's numerous recommendations for institutional change.”

The provisions also call on OPIC to undertake an open and competitive hiring process to fill the vacant Office of Accountability Director position, which has been unstaffed for months since the report's release. The previous Director was the primary author of the report, and the vacancy has left communities harmed by OPIC-supported projects without an independent office to receive their complaints. “A functional and effective Office of Accountability is fundamental to providing project-affected communities with an independent and safe forum to express their concerns,” stated Anne Schuit, a researcher at the Dutch organization SOMO in its Human Rights and Grievance Mechanisms program. “It is reassuring to see that the U.S. government views the Office of Accountability as an essential component of achieving positive development outcomes for vulnerable communities.”

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Notes for editors

1. The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr83enr/pdf/BILLS-113hr83enr.pdf>.
2. The report, authored by OPIC's independent Office of Accountability, is available at [http://www.opic.gov/sites/default/files/files/OA%20Buchanan%20Report\(1\).pdf](http://www.opic.gov/sites/default/files/files/OA%20Buchanan%20Report(1).pdf) and OPIC's short response is available at [http://www.opic.gov/sites/default/files/files/Management%20Response%20to%20Buchanan%20Renewables%20Fuel%20and%20Energy%20Projects%20in%20Liberia\(2\).pdf](http://www.opic.gov/sites/default/files/files/Management%20Response%20to%20Buchanan%20Renewables%20Fuel%20and%20Energy%20Projects%20in%20Liberia(2).pdf).
3. The complaint to OPIC's President and CEO, a detailed report documenting these abuses, and a video are available at <http://www.accountabilitycounsel.org/communities/current-cases/liberia-biomass-project-of-buchanan-renewables/>. Two additional reports about the impacts of the project are available at http://www.somo.nl/publications-en/Publication_3715?set_language=en and http://www.somo.nl/publications-en/Publication_3942.
4. These provisions are contained in an explanatory statement that is attached to the Act. The statement is included in the Congressional Record for December 11, 2014, and is available at <https://www.congress.gov/crec/2014/12/11/CREC-2014-12-11-bk2.pdf>.

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