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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OTTAWA, ON – This morning, two human rights organizations filed a complaint with the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) against Calgary-based oil and gas company ReconAfrica Energy Africa Ltd. (ReconAfrica) alleging human rights abuses in Namibia.

The complaint was submitted by Saving Okavango's Unique Life (SOUL) and the International Human Rights Program (IHRP) at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law.

"ReconAfrica's oil exploration activities have damaged homes, devastated subsistence crops, and destroyed land, illegally and without the consent of local Indigenous communities," said Rob Parker, active member of SOUL. "They've demonstrated a complete lack of concern for the impact that their actions have on the fundamental rights of the local communities and the protected species that will be driven closer to extinction."

In 2019, ReconAfrica began oil exploration activities under an exploratory drilling license covering a 13,200 square mile area of the Kavango region, which includes part of the ecologically sensitive Okavango Delta, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The company's extractive activities were commenced without consulting Indigenous communities who occupy and cultivate this land, in violation of both Namibian law and international human rights instruments.

The complaint alleges that ReconAfrica's operations led to violations of multiple international human rights, including the rights to health, water, food, and adequate housing, and the requirement of Indigenous peoples' free, prior, and informed consent where their land is taken for resource extraction or to store harmful substances.

The delta's watershed consists of the Okavango River and a network of shallow, interlinked aquifers – a vital water source for more than a million people. The Okavango Delta also serves as a habitat and migration path for endangered animal species.

"We fear long-term damage if ReconAfrica continues its activities," said Max Muyemburuko, member of SOUL and former Chairperson of the Kavango East and West Regional Conservancy. "The damage may be irreversible for both residents and animal populations."

"Through this complaint, we request that the CORE launch a full investigation of past and ongoing human rights abuses by ReconAfrica, and call on ReconAfrica to halt their operations until proper

consultations are conducted and concerns addressed, reflected in verifiable changes to their operations and policies," said James Yap, Acting Director of the IHRP. "It is in Canada's national interest that Canadian companies be held accountable for their actions abroad. We urge the CORE to take the opportunity to investigate this matter, which falls squarely within its mandate."

Established by the Canadian government in April 2019, the CORE is tasked with reviewing complaints about possible human rights abuses involving Canadian companies operating abroad in the garment, mining, and oil and gas sectors. As of the publication date of the CORE's Q3 2023-2024 Quarterly Report on Inquiries and Complaints, the Ombudsperson has not received any complaints about Canadian oil and gas companies, making this complaint the first of its kind.

Saving Okavango's Unique Life (SOUL) is a Namibian civil society consortium of citizens, Indigenous peoples, impacted communities, civil society organizations and scientists who came together to stop ReconAfrica's oil and gas exploration and drilling in the Okavango Delta and its watershed.

The International Human Rights Program (IHRP) at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law is a centre for international human rights work. Established in 1987, the IHRP aims to encourage Canada's adherence to its own international human rights commitments by ensuring accountability of its harms worldwide and those of third parties to which it is meant to regulate.

### **Contact Information**

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