

RRDC's REJOINDER: Wilmar International Announces Policy to Protect Forests and Communities.

No Deforestation, No Peat, No Exploitation Policy to meet rising Market demand for traceable, responsibly produced vegetable oil. (Singapore, 5 December, 2013)

As an NGO working extensively in the forest region of Cross River State of Nigeria, we have reasons to express some doubts about the implementation of the laudable objectives expressed in this press release issued by Wilmar International. Within the Cross River State of Nigeria for instance, the blue print issued by Wilmar at the inauguration of her CALARO, IBEA & BIASE oil Palm Plantation projects on the 12th of November, 2012, in the Cross River State of Nigeria, shows that Wilmar International is intending to develop plantations over a territory that amounts to 50,000 hectares. According to Wilmar, "the plan is to develop the initial 50,000 ha plantations in the next 5 year period. We have so far completed acquisition of approx. 30,000 ha of land suitable for Oil Palm development in the Cross River State and have established nurseries at 3 locations – Calaro, Ibiea and Biase estates." More than eighty percent (80%) of these lands will include community forest and farmlands of indigenous communities which have never been cultivated as oil palm plantations. There is therefore no way Wilmar International will be able to develop oil palm plantations in the New Planting territories without massive destruction of forest.

If Wilmar's operations in Cross River State of Nigeria are only limited to revitalization of existing oil palm plantations, then there will indeed be no problem. This would mean that the operations of Wilmar in this region will be limited only to revitalization of IBEA Estate, CALARO Estate, and Kwa falls Estate. On the contrary, the facts on ground show that Wilmar is already in the process of developing plantations on community forestlands as well as areas of internationally recognized conservation interest.

- The territory described in Wilmar's inauguration brochure of 12th of November, 2012, and the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) study developed by PROFOREST as BIASE New Planting area is entirely a fresh community forest stock which has never been placed under monoculture plantation of any kind.

- The territory that is presently being acquired by Wilmar under the title of Obasanjor Farms is a complex forest stock that has since the inauguration of Obasanjor Farm project been under severe criticism and social contest.

- The territory of Obasanjor Farms encompasses completely the Ekinta Forest Reserve which until today is officially under conservation by the Cross River State of Nigeria, being that no De-

reservation Order has ever been published in a gazette in respect of the forest reserve as required by the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Laws of Cross River State of Nigeria.

- The territory of Obasanjor Farms encompasses some forest land mass that have encroached significantly into the OBAN HILLS DIVISION of the CROS RIVER STATE NATIONAL PARK (CRNP). There is therefore no way in which Wilmar can develop plantations on this highly disputed and contested territory without infringing upon conservation and environmental laws as well as community interest.

- There are several other community forest stocks adjoining areas of conservation interest in the support zone of the Cross River National Park which Wilmar is presently negotiating acquisition. There is also no possibility of Wilmar developing plantations in these places without massive deforestation and infringement of community interest.

CAUTION

On the whole, one must exercise caution in accepting the recent policy declaration of Wilmar as far as the Cross River State of Nigeria is concern. In this area, Wilmar International is not actually operating as Wilmar but under the auspices of various locally registered companies. In IBEA for instance, the company is operating under the name BIASE PLANTATIONS LTD, and in Ikom/Obubra axis, the name is called EYOP Industries Limited. Thus there is the possibility of someone observing violations committed by one or all of these surrogates against community interest and environmental laws without the person being able to trace such violations to Wilmar International. It actually requires organizations that have been following closely the operations of the Wilmar surrogates in this territory to be able to document violations and trace them to Wilmar.

In the final analysis, the policy pronouncement of Wilmar can only be considered to be valid in Cross River State of Nigeria for as long as the operations of Wilmar in the area are exclusively limited to the revitalization of the territories of old and existing monoculture plantations. In essence therefore, the Wilmar International Policy as far as this region is concern translates to mean a period of two (2) years moratorium. That is, from December 2013 to December 2015 within which Wilmar will have the freedom to destroy massively, without any restraint whatsoever the forest of this area before any organization can hold it bound by its No Deforestation...Policy. In our own estimation, Wilmar has the technical capacity to destroy all the forests of this region within six months. Thus Wilmar is only attempting to buy time and divert public attention for the massive forest destruction activities that the company is already poised to execute in this region in accordance with its already published blue print of November 2012.

It is our considered opinion therefore, that the test of Wilmar's honesty of purpose towards its new policy declaration will be for Wilmar to declare locally in the Cross River State of Nigeria that it will not embark anymore on any new planting projects that will involve deforestation in community forest territories, forest reservations and National Park territories. This local declaration should also include withdrawal of all intentions towards acquisition and deforestation of forestlands and community farmlands over which Wilmar is presently exercising interest in the region.

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Sign:.....

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