

JUNE 2012

Take Action Now

Global Response Campaign Alert Cameroon

“If we give the land to the plantation, it will lead to a devastating effect on our land because the environmental implications are outstanding.”

—Ngolo Chief

It takes little time to destroy the rainforest of Southwest Cameroon, estimated to be 60 million years old.

Cameroon

Stop Oil Palm Plantations from Destroying Africa's Ancient Rainforests

In the southwest region of Cameroon, within a beautiful rainforest, several Indigenous communities are working hard to make their voices heard. Their struggle began in 2011 when the government of Cameroon granted a vast land concession to SG Sustainable Oils, a subsidiary of the New York-based Herakles Farms. What the government overlooked, was that this concession occurred on the homelands of the Oroko, Bakossi, and Upper Bayang peoples in the Ndian, Koupé-Manengouba, and Manyu divisions of Cameroon. Herakles Farms plans to clear and replace 300 square miles of virgin rainforest with monoculture trees to establish an oil palm plantation. This plantation will have major impacts on approximately 52,000 Indigenous peoples in 88 villages who are dependent on the forest for their livelihoods and way of life. The giant plantation will also fragment and isolate the region's protected areas, including Korup National Park, Bakossi National Park, Banyang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary, Nta Ali Forest Reserve, and Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve. Despite the domestic laws of Cameroon that were implemented to protect rainforests from massive land leases, Herakles Farms has moved forward with the removal of the rainforest and the expansion of their oil palm nursery.

The government's concession to Herakles also affords the company power to arrest and detain anyone "trespassing" on their leased land. The power that the government has bestowed upon Herakles denies the Indigenous people of this region the right to free movement on ancestral lands as guaranteed to them in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights, and by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Cameroon is a signee.

The Indigenous Oroko, Bakossi, and Upper Bayang peoples are claiming their legal rights to free, prior and informed consent as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They ask for the voice of the international community to join theirs in urging decision-makers at Herakles to listen.

It's time for the private sector to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights to free, prior and informed consent. Let's urge Herakles Farms to do this now!



Oil palm seedlings
will replace the ancient
rainforest vegetation.

Photo by Felix Horne

A Disregard for Indigenous Knowledge and Participation

For hundreds of years, the peoples of the rainforest in the southwest region of Cameroon, one of the oldest rainforests in Africa, have depended on the forest for their livelihoods. Now, with the threat of clear-cutting by Herakles Farms of their ancestral lands to make way for an oil palm plantation, they are being kept out of the decision-making process. This 300-square mile oil palm plantation requires the complete clearing of the rainforest, leading to the total destruction of the region's natural ecosystem.

The Ndian Youth Economic and Cultural Organization (NYECO) and other local community organizations are alarmed by the refusal of Herakles to respect court decisions by the Lower and High Courts of the Ndian division in August of 2011 and again in February of 2012 that prohibited Herakles from further expansion in the area and ordered the company to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment process. Herakles has ignored this order, and continues clearing native forest and expanding their oil palm nurseries. "We feel that this project will cause irreparable damage to our social, cultural, and environmental welfare and well-being," stated members of NYECO. In March 2012, a group of 11 scientists from leading academic and research institutions around the world issued an open letter in opposition to the proposed plantation. The letter expressed deep concern for the plantation, stating that the rainforest is an ecologically rich and diverse ecosystem and that it has been recognized as a global center of biodiversity by the World Wide Fund for Nature and Conservation International.

The oil palm plantations have been touted by Herakles' own NGO, All for Africa, as part of a "Palm out of Poverty" program as being environmentally and socially sustainable. Many scientists, however, explained that palm oil "can only have a benefit in slowing climate change if they do not promote deforestation, especially in tropical regions where forests store large quantities of carbon." But Herakles has located their concession in the midst of a biodiverse hotspot, on land that buffers and provides vital support functions to the surrounding national parks and protected areas. Scientists have urged the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, a multi-stakeholder body that certifies the sustainable development of palm oil, to reject Herakles' request for certification, as well as the government of Cameroon to prohibit further activity until pressing concerns are resolved.

Article 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, signed by Cameroon, states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources." Herakles Farms and the government of Cameroon are obligated to adhere to this, and begin a consultation process with the affected communities.

The Indigenous Peoples of the southwest region of Cameroon are not asking for a favor, but to be given a rightful seat at the decision-making table. They are claiming their rights as defined in law. As a global community with a stake in the preservation of biologically diverse rainforests and the defense of human rights, our actions can amplify the volume of the voices of the Oroko, Bakossi, and Upper Bayang people.

You Can Help!

The Ndian Youth Economic and Cultural Organization asks world citizens to send polite letters to the leadership of Herakles Farms and All For Africa. In your letters, please:

- Express concern that Herakles Farms is violating the rights of Indigenous Peoples by not consulting them and that the planned plantation will gravely impact local people's rainforest-based livelihoods.
- Urge them to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights to free, prior and informed consent in regards to any development project that may affect them, enshrined in international law, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Emphasize that the giant plantation will fragment protected areas, including Korup National Park and four others, threatening rainforest ecosystems, recognized as a global center of biodiversity by the World Wide Fund for Nature and Conservation International.
- Ask them to stop all work on the plantation and abide by the recent court decision in Cameroon to halt the project until Herakles Farms conducts proper impact assessments (including social and high conservation value forest assessments) in partnership with the Indigenous people in the area.

Please send polite letters, faxes, or emails to:

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Tips:

- Postage within the U.S. is 45 cents.
- Postage from the U.S. to the Malaysia is \$1.05.
- A model letter is available at www.cs.org.
- Personal, mailed letters have the most impact!

For more information, please see:

www.cs.org and stop-herakles.org/de/home

Thank you very much.