

To the owners and the investors of Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC): Wale Adeosun, Chief Executive Officer, Kuramo Capital Management; Jide Zeitlin, Managing Director, The Keffi Group; Kalaa Mpinga, Chief Investment Officer, Mafuta Investment Holding Ltd; Larry Seruma, Chief Investment Officer, Nile Capital Management; Santo Ono, President, University of Michigan; Bill Gates, Co-Chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Trust; Abel Sithole, Chief Executive Officer, Public Investment Corporation; Sifiso Sibiyi, Head of Investments, Government Employees Pension Fund of South Africa; Andrew Martin, Chancellor, Washington University in St. Louis; Livingstone Wong, Chief Executive Officer, Trustees of the Estate of Bernice Pauahi Bishop; Morton Schapiro, President, Northwestern University

To the development banks with a historical responsibility towards the communities impacted by PHC: Nick O'Donohoe, Chief Executive Officer, British International Investment (UK); Luuk Zonneveld, Chief Executive Officer, Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (Belgium), Roland Siller, Chief Executive Officer, Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft (Germany), Michael Jongeneel, Chief Executive Officer, FMO (Netherlands) and Françoise Lombard, Chief Executive Officer, Proparco (France)

To the Honorable Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Honorable Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde, Prime Minister of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

15 November 2022

Subject: Call for immediate action to stop repression and human rights violations faced by local communities at the PHC plantations in the DR Congo

We are greatly alarmed by the violent acts committed by the armed forces and national police of the *Democratic Republic of the Congo* (DRC) government and guards working for the company Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC) in Lokutu and Boteka, which have dramatically intensified since September 2022.

As reported by the Congolese non-governmental organisation RIAO-RDC on November 10, 2022, these actions, committed under the guise of a large-scale mission to stop the theft of palm nuts from PHC's plantations, are causing severe hardship to the local people and grave human rights violations.¹ The violations reported by local villagers include arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, physical violence, rape, and the deliberate destruction of homes and property. Several hundred households are said to have taken refuge in the neighbouring forests.

We call on the investors of PHC, the development banks with a historical responsibility towards the communities impacted by PHC and the government of the DR Congo to do everything in their power to ensure that the military and police contingents in Boteka and Lokutu are withdrawn, that human rights violations and damages to property are independently investigated, and that justice and compensation are provided to all those who have been affected by the violence during the raids of the past two months.

¹ RIAO-RDC, "Palm oil company, police and military conduct massive, violent rampage against villagers in the DR Congo," 10 November 2022: <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/31235>

We wholly reject PHC's claim that the company is a victim of organised theft to justify the violence and the mass arrests of local villagers. PHC cannot, as it has in the past, distance itself from the abuses by the armed forces and national police, given that security forces are called in by the company, that they use unchecked and overwhelming force to protect its interests, and that they are accompanied by PHC security guards and travel in PHC vehicles.

This sudden and extreme use of force is being used to deal with what is fundamentally a social issue related to a century-old land conflict between the communities and the company. Oil palm has been cultivated and processed in the area since long before the PHC plantations were established.

The armed raids on villagers are happening in the midst of a mediation process between PHC and eleven villages, under the International Complaints Mechanism (ICM) of the development banks of Germany (DEG), the Netherlands (FMO) and France (Proparco). This mediation process is supposed to provide a solution to the land conflict and a resolution to the tensions that have plagued the area ever since lands were first taken from the communities under Belgian occupation over 100 years ago.

The Development Banks and ICM have an obligation to ensure that the [extremely delayed complaints](#) process can proceed as soon as possible and that it focuses, as agreed, on addressing the historical land conflict, particularly the illegality of the concessions and the need for land redistribution. However, this requires that the Development Banks provide the adequate means and infrastructure to establish a safe space and security for all affected communities who are engaged in the process, something which they have clearly failed to do so far.

PHC's stakeholders have blood on their hands and must be held accountable for the violence. They must take immediate action to ensure PHC fully respects the ICM mediation process and that it desists from any and all actions that might undermine it.

Best Regards,

Danielle van Oijen, Milieudefensie – Friends of the Earth Netherlands

Signed by:

Corner House UK

FIAN Belgium

FIAN Germany

Global Legal Action Network

GRAIN

The Oakland Institute (US)

Réseau d'Information et d'Appui aux ONG nationales (DRC)

Réseau des Acteurs du Développement Durable (Cameroon)

Rettet den Regenwald (Germany)

Syndicat National des Paysans et Riverains du Cameroun (Cameroon)

World Rainforest Movement