

HuMa



Forest
Peoples
Programme

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New Report Exposes Human Rights Abuses in Wilmar Group Plantation in Jambi, Indonesia

A new report released today exposes how local Indonesian police (BRIMOB) in Jambi, working with plantation staff, systematically evicted people from three settlements, firing guns to scare them off and then using heavy machinery to destroy their dwellings and bulldoze concrete floors into the nearby creeks. The operations were carried out over a week in mid-August this year and have already sparked an international controversy. Andiko, Executive Director of the Indonesian community rights NGO, HuMa said:

“Forced evictions at gun point and the destruction of the homes of men, women and children without warning or a court order constitute serious abuses of human rights and are contrary to police norms. The company must now make reparations but individual perpetrators should also be investigated and punished in accordance with the law.”

The operations occurred in the 20,000 hectare oil palm concession of PT Asiatic Persada, a 51%-owned subsidiary of the Wilmar Group. Singapore-based Wilmar is represented on the Executive Board of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and as well as holding over 600,000 ha. of plantations in Malaysia and Indonesia, has expansion plans in other continents, is the world’s largest palm oil trader and has processing facilities in Sumatra and Europe. Abetnego Tarigan, Executive Director of the Indonesian NGO, SawitWatch, which is also a board member of the RSPO, stated,

“Frankly we are very disappointed. We expect leading members of the RSPO to scrupulously adhere to the agreed standard, which includes respecting peoples’ customary rights and resolving disputes. RSPO member companies should pro-actively reach out to communities and not resort to the heavy-handed tactics of past eras.”

As detailed in the report, underlying the present problems is a long-standing land conflict with the local communities whose lands were taken over by the oil palm plantation without recognising their rights, without compensation and without their consent. Wilmar, which took over the plantation in 2006, has declined to recognise the communities’ land claims or offer them smallholdings within its concession instead offering them shares in a 50/50 1000 ha joint venture further west. Some community members, who did join this scheme, have since repudiated it claiming it has brought them few benefits and further conflicts.

Marcus Colchester, who led the field team that investigated the situation and who is Director of the international human rights group, Forest Peoples Programme, noted that the NGOs have now filed a third complaint about Wilmar with the International Finance Corporation’s Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO). The previous complaints had led to the suspension of all World Bank funding to the palm oil sector worldwide. Currently, the CAO still has an ongoing process to mediate the disputes between Wilmar subsidiaries and the communities. However, in Jambi, these efforts broke down in June this year. Colchester said:

“The good news is that Wilmar has apparently now agreed to the CAO returning to mediate in resolving this land conflict. Let’s hope this time both the CAO and the company invest enough to resolve these disputes in line with the IFC Performance Standards, the RSPO standard and international human rights norms. But we can’t help asking, why is it taking so long? The delays in achieving redress and justice for local communities are unacceptable.”

The new report is available at: <http://www.forestpeoples.org/human-rights-abuses-and-land-conflicts-in-pt-asiatic-persada-palm-oil-concession-Jambi-Indonesia>

Ends.

NOTICE TO EDITORS:

The 9th Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil will meet in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, on 22 - 24 November 2011.

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A Press Briefing will be held on 21 November in Kota Kinabalu. Contact Norman Jiwan, Tel: +6281315613536, E-Mail: norman@sawitwatch.or.id for details.

Human rights abuses and land conflicts in the PT Asiatic Persada concession in Jambi: report of an independent investigation into land disputes and forced evictions in a palm oil estate, November 2011, by Marcus Colchester¹, Patrick Anderson², Asep Yunan Firdaus³, Fatilda Hasibuan⁴ and Sophie Chao⁵:
<http://www.forestpeoples.org/human-rights-abuses-and-land-conflicts-in-pt-asiatic-persada-palm-oil-concession-Jambi-Indonesia>

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