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Open Letter to RSPO and WWF

Palm oil monocultures will never be sustainable

One year ago, the “International Declaration Against the ‘Greenwashing’ of Palm Oil by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil” was published, signed by over 250 organisations worldwide (<http://www.regenwald.org/international/englisch/news.php?id=1070>). Since then, the RSPO has continued to certify palm oil produced by companies which are directly responsible for violating the rights of local communities, for the ongoing destruction of rainforests and peatlands and other abuses against people, the environment and climate. Even worse, palm oil suppliers are being granted ‘interim’ RSPO certification based solely on self-assessments.

Destructive oil palm plantations have been certified in Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea and the same greenwashing exercise has started in Colombia, Thailand and Ghana.

We are deeply concerned that RSPO certification is being used to legitimise an expansion in the demand for palm oil and thus in oil palm plantation, and it serves to greenwash the disastrous social and environmental impacts of the palm oil industry. The RSPO standards do not exclude clear cutting of many natural forests, the destruction of other important ecosystems, nor plantings on peat. The RSPO certifies plantations which impact on the livelihoods of local communities and their environments. The problems are exacerbated by the in-built conflict of interest in the system under which a company wanting to be certified commissions another company to carry out the assessment.

We are also concerned about the role played by WWF in promoting the RSPO and using it to support endless growth in the demand for palm oil. WWF initiated the founding of the RSPO, continues to lobby worldwide for it, and combines this with their support for the agrofuel industry, including palm oil.

WWF’s involvement is being used by agrofuel companies to justify building more refineries and more palm oil power stations in Europe. The promise of ‘sustainable palm oil’, backed by WWF, was one important factor behind the EU’s decision to go ahead with a 10% agrofuel target by 2020, and the RSPO will be used to allow palm oil to become eligible for EU agrofuel subsidies and other support. This is speeding up indiscriminate palm oil expansion in even more countries, including Mexico, Guatemala, Cameroon, DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Uganda and Tanzania.

Unilever, with 1.6 million tonnes per year the biggest palm oil consumer in the world, uses a ‘commitment’ to use RSPO palm oil in future as a way of portraying itself as a ‘responsible’ company, ignoring the real impacts of palm oil. Wilmar International has applied for RSPO certificates in Indonesia, even though evidence of their involvement in illegal land-grabbing, fire-raising and rainforest and peatland destruction has led to the World Bank having suspended funding for palm oil. That hard-won suspension is now at risk of being lost because of false promises by the RSPO.

In Colombia, palm oil company Daabon, an RSPO member, succeeded in being portrayed in European media as a ‘responsible’ company, despite the fact that they had illegally evicted

small farmers from their land, felled trees and contaminated the Caribbean Sea with palm oil spills. In South-east Asia, IOI has had plantations certified, despite being responsible for the illegal destruction of peatlands and rainforests in Kalimantan, destroying the livelihood of indigenous peoples. Their customer Neste Oil has gained an interim RSPO certificate on this basis and is using this to promote biofuels for aviation, while building the world's biggest palm oil biofuel refinery.

Palm oil monocultures for food production, cosmetic and chemical industries and agrofuels are a major cause of deforestation and climate change, they destroy the livelihoods of millions of small farmers, indigenous peoples and other communities. They require agro-chemicals which poison workers and communities, soil, water and wildlife, they deplete freshwater and soils. Palm oil monocultures are not and can never be sustainable and 'certification' serves as a means of perpetuating and expanding this destructive industry.

We therefore reiterate the call made in the International Declaration last year and demand

- + An end to all agrofuel targets, subsidies and incentives, particularly in Europe and the US;*
- + Major reductions in the demand for vegetable oil and energy in the North;*
- + The cancellation of trade relations between companies purchasing palm oil and suppliers destroying forests and peatlands as they are responsible for or benefit from violating Human Rights;*
- + Land reform to devolve land to local communities, guarantee food sovereignty and restore biodiverse agriculture and ecosystems;*
- + Resolution of land conflicts, protection of human rights, reparation for damages;*
- + Restoring all remaining peatlands which have been drained for oil palms as far as this is still possible in order to mitigate global warming.*

NGOs should not lend legitimacy to the RSPO and WWF must stop promoting the RSPO palm oil supporting agrofuels;

Governments in Europe and the US must reduce the demand for palm oil by stopping the policies which have created the artificial agrofuel market and ending agrofuel use.

NOTES:

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is a private organisation or 'stakeholder forum', which has created an 'independent' label for certification of 'sustainable' palm oil. Among the members of the RSPO are 80 palm oil plantation companies and federations, 8 banks and finance companies, 51 consumer good manufacturers, 23 retailers, 118 processors and traders and 21 NGOs.

Signatures:

Acción Ecológica – Ecuador

Action Populaire Contre la Mondialisation, Geneva, Switzerland

Afosci, Paraguay

Afrika-Europa Network, Netherlands

Agencia de los Pueblos En Pie, Ecuador

Alert against the Green Desert Network, Brazil

Alotau Environment Ltd, Papua New Guinea

Amigos de la Tierra Buenos Aires, Argentina

A SEED Europe, Netherlands
Asociacion de Solidaridad con Colombia "ASOC-KATÍO", Spain
ASOCONSUMO, Colombia
Asolatino Berna, Swiss
Attac, Spain
Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe, Germany
BI "Kein Strom aus Palmöl !" - Germany
Biofuelwatch, UK
Bismarck Ramu Group - Madang, Papua New Guinea
Centre for Orangutan Protection, Indonesia
CETRI - Centro tricontinental, Belgica
Centro de Acogida para inmigrantes y de Promocion Cultural "E. Balducci", Italia
Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo S. J." (CSMM), Ecuador
CENTRO DE MUJERES "AMELIA BRUHN", CHILE
Centro Ecologista Renacer, Argentina
Climat et Justice Sociale, Genève
CODDEFFAGOLF, Honduras
COECOCEIBA-AT Costa Rica
Colectivo de Colombianos Refugiados en Asturias, Spain
Colectivo Rosa Luxemburgo, Chiapas, México
Colectivo Sur Cacarica, Spain
Comité Cerezo, México
Comité Oscar Romero de Madrid, Spain
Comité Oscar Romero de Vigo, Spain
Comunidad cristiana Mártires de Uganda, Spain
Cooperativa de Artesanas Jolom Mayaetik, Chiapas, México
Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (CNOC), Guatemala
Corporate Europe Observatory, Bruselas, Bélgica
Cristianos de Base, España
DWK Panama e.V. , Germany
Ecological Internet, Papua New Guinea.
Ecological Society of the Philippines
Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
Ecoportal.Net, Argentina
Envirocare, Tanzania
FASE /Espirito Santo, Brazil
FASE Bahia, Brazil
Federación de Comités de Solidaridad con África Negra, Spain
FEDICAMP – Esteli, Nicaragua
FOBOMADE Bolivia
Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika e.V. FDCL, Germany
Freunde der Naturvölker e.V./FdN (fPcN), Germany
Gesellschaft zur Rettung der Delphine, Germany
Grupo de Trabajo Suiza Colombia, Basilea/Berna
Guildford and Waverley Friends of the Earth Group, England
Kinal Antsetik, A. C., Chiapas, México
KoBra, Germany
Labour, Health and Human Rights DEvelopment Centre, Nigeria
Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations RECOMA
"La pluma", Equipo de "Los Pueblos en Pie, grupo Francia
Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, Chiapas, Mexico
Mandacarú, Germany
Mangrove Action Project MAP, USA
Munloch Vigil, Scotland
Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas CNOC, Guatemala

Network for ecofarming in Africa NECOFA, Kenya
Network of Alternatives against Impunity and Market Globalisation, International
North East Peoples Allinace, North East India
Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales, Chile
Osservatorio Informativo sulla Americhe, Italy
Otros Mundos, Mexico
Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition PIPEC, New Zeland
Plataforma de Solidaridad con Chiapas de Madrid, Spain
Programa de Defensa de Derechos Indígenas – Perú
Programa Universitario México Nación Multicultural PUMC-UNAM of Oaxaca, México
REDES – FOE, Uruguay
Regenwald-Institut e.V., Germany
Robin Wood, Germany
Salva la Selva/Rettet den Regenwald, Germany
Save Our Borneo, Indonesia
SAVIA, Guatemala
Secretariado de Centroamerica, Zentral America Secretariat, Switzerland
Servicios Jurídicos y Sociales SERJUS, Guatemala
Sobrevivencia, Amigos de la Tierra Paraguay
Sociedad Colombiana de Automovilistas, Colombia
Socio-Ecológica *LaFuerza*, Guatemala
South Durban Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), Southafrica
SPI (Indonesian Peasant Union), Indonesia
Toxicsoy.org, Netherlands
UmweltHaus am Schüberg, Germany
Union paysanne du Québec, Canadá
Vegetarierbund Deutschland VEBU, Germany
Watch Indonesia!, Germany
World Rainforest Movement, Uruguay
XXI Solidario, Spain
Youth, governance and environmental programme Y-GEP, Kenya

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