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## POSITION STATEMENT BY WOMEN LIVING IN THE VICINITY OF AGRO-INDUSTRIES ON THE RESPECT OF THEIR LAND RIGHTS

Women in general, especially in rural areas, play an important role in economic life. As producers, they are at the heart of the organisation of family farming and they possess traditional expertise that makes them the pillars of families and enables them to meet the challenge of food self-sufficiency. Aware of this role, we, as women living in the vicinity of eight (08) agro-industrial plantations (HEVECAM, SUDCAM, SOCAPALM, PHP, BIOPALM, SEMRY, RUBBERCAM, SOSUCAM) have gathered in the context of the celebrations related to the International Women's Rights Day 2020 to discuss the impacts of agro-industrial plantations on women's land rights.

Through this note, we welcome the positive actions implemented by some of these agro-industries to varying degrees. We also make recommendations to administrations, companies, traditional authorities and civil society organisations for a better consideration of women's land rights in the context of the development of agro-industrial plantations.

### **A. Denouncing Violations of Women's Land Rights**

We, the women who live near the agro-industrial plantations listed above, denounce the following violations:

- The seizure of customary land and fallow land used by women for their fields or their traditional rites;
- The destruction and/or drainage of watercourses in which women used to fish;
- The dumping of agro-industrial waste and the pollution of rivers, soil and air;
- The clearing of forests and the destruction of non-timber forest products formerly collected, consumed, processed and sold by women;
- The destruction of medicinal plants used by women to treat certain illnesses in their families;

- The restriction and/or prohibition of access to village tracks that now cross the plantations that women take to carry out their farming, fishing, gathering and/or hunting activities;
- The destruction of the traditional habitat of indigenous peoples and their removal from the forests;
- The theft of women's crops by some employees of agro-industrial companies;
- The sexual abuse of women by some employees of agro-industries;
- The low participation of women in land management in the villages;
- The poor working conditions and abusive terminations of women employed in the agribusinesses;
- The debts contracted by some employees of the agribusinesses with women food vendors, which are left unpaid, thus affecting the family economy;
- The militarisation of certain agro-industrial plantations.

## **B. Consequences on Women's Wellbeing**

For us women, the problems listed above have the following consequences:

- Arable land is reduced and land conflicts within villages have increased;
- Women are forced to travel tens of kilometres to find agricultural land and to collect non-timber forest products;
- Agricultural production is decreasing both in terms of quantity and quality, and women have difficulties finding food for their families;
- Women's incomes are declining and are less and less sufficient to meet our daily needs;
- Women are under pressure from family members to abandon fallow land;
- Women are becoming increasingly ill and do not have sufficient income to go to hospitals, sometimes tens of kilometres away from their homes for treatment;
- Women are victims of STDs and some homes are being destroyed as a result of sexual abuse by some agro-industrial workers;
- Women's working hours in their fields are decreasing, because they are afraid of being sexually assaulted if they stay alone or for long periods of time on their plantations;
- Women can no longer play their role as transmitters of culture and traditional knowledge because of the destruction of the forests.

## **C. Recommendations**

Women make the following recommendations to administrative authorities, agro-industrial enterprises, civil society and women themselves:

#### **To administrative authorities**

- Supporting rural women in the development of their fallow land;
- Taking into account the land needs of communities and women before the allocation of a concession;
- Adopting a text that sets out the methods for calculating the living space (Parliamentarians and Administrations) of the communities;
- Supervising the retrocession so that it can benefit all the constituents of the village population, including women;
- Ensuring that agro-industries comply with environmental obligations;
- Prohibiting the killing of species vital to communities (MINFOF);
- Emphasising the fight against corruption in the land and forestry sector;
- Recognising the land rights of indigenous peoples over forests and resources that they occupy and respecting them when allocating land and forestry concessions;
- Compensating Indigenous communities for the loss of their lands and resources, when they have been expelled from their forest for the benefit of agribusinesses.

#### **To companies**

- Stopping the drainage, destruction and pollution of watercourses, and carrying out repairs where this has already taken place;
- Providing better waste treatment;
- Not encroaching on village tracks and keeping them free of access for communities ;
- Closing the trenches dug along the plantations;
- Sensitising their employees on the respect of land rights, women's rights, gender-based violence and setting up a reporting mechanism in collaboration with local women;
- Withdrawing from the vital space of the communities;
- Ensuring that their subcontractors respect the law, particularly labour law.

#### **To companies and administrative authorities**

- Sensitising women in communities before the creation of any agro-industrial plantations;

- Making participatory maps to know the areas of each village and the uses of all the constituents of the villages' population, and using them before any allocation of land;
- Involving women in the marking of the boundaries of agro-industrial concessions;
- Compensating communities for the destruction of watercourses through the creation of water points and fish ponds;
- Proceeding, with the participation of women and community members, in the demarcation of the communities' living space;
- Enabling the regeneration of forests, especially with species useful for local populations.

#### **To women**

- Organising better and acting in solidarity to better claim the respect of your rights;
- Denouncing all cases of sexual abuse perpetrated against women.

#### **To civil society organisations**

- Sensitising and training women on their human rights, including the right to a healthy environment;
- Supporting women in formulating proposals for a better consideration of their land rights in the land reform;
- Supporting all stakeholders on better respecting women's rights to land and natural resources.

#### **To Traditional Authorities**

- Including women in the local management of land and natural resources (administrative authorities must ensure that these commitments are respected);
- Learning about the role and importance of women in land management at the local level.

#### **To the media**

- Bringing to the attention of national and international opinion the problems faced by women in the vicinity of agro-industrial plantations and helping in the search of solutions.

### **To all stakeholders**

- Involving women in all dialogue frameworks and decision-making bodies;
- Paying particular attention to the protection of women active in the defense of women's rights to land and natural resources, in order to prevent their rights being violated as a result of their actions.

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