



PRESS RELEASE

Local communities across Africa demand justice and land rights over abuses by Belgium's SIAT Group

21 September 2023. Local communities impacted by the operations of Belgium's SIAT Group are rising up in unity against land and human rights abuses. From Ghana to Nigeria and Ivory Coast, these communities seek an end to a decade-long conflict tied to SIAT's extensive plantations.

The SIAT Group, with its vast cultivation of over 76,000 hectares across five countries in Africa and Asia, specializes in rubber and palm oil production. Notable multinationals including Unilever (UK), Nestlé (Switzerland), Michelin (France), and Goodyear (US) source raw materials from SIAT. However, local communities level severe accusations against the company: land grabbing, deforestation and violations of human and threats to food security. Affected communities in Ghana, Ivory Coast and Nigeria have joined forces with others within the Informal Alliance Against Industrial Plantations in West and Central Africa to demand that justice be done.

In Ivory Coast, the NSIA bank, a subsidiary of the pan-African financial group, recently seized the SIAT-owned Compagnie Hévécicole de Prikro (CHP) plantation due to financial default.

"This latest incident confirms the lack of respect shown to our communities. Nobody consulted us. In fact, we are the only ones who have the right to seize the plantation. We have been denouncing this land grab for more than 10 years" states Sinan Ouattara, representative for the Roi d'Andoh community. The communities affected by CHP's activities have decided, with the help of lawyers, to assert their rights against the SIAT group. They believe that they have never been consulted or received compensation for the damage suffered since the company arrived on their land. In addition to the seizure of their land and the destruction of their crops and a sacred forest, they denounce SIAT's complicity in the ongoing repression to which they have been subjected since 2013. In 2015 alone, this repression led to the death of 2 people, the arrest and arbitrary detention of nearly 70 people, and dozens of injuries.

Meanwhile, in Ghana, the streets echo with community demands: land repatriation, fair employment conditions, cessation of violence, and a spotlight on the environmental degradation from monoculture practices. A major demonstration is taking place today at the Group's plantations.

In Nigeria, news surfaces that Saroafrika, a leading African agribusiness, is negotiating to acquire an 86% stake in the Belgium-based SIAT. In response, Nigerian communities sent a letter to the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) urging conflict resolution as a condition for the Commission's approval of Saroafrika's purchase of the Belgian family's stake in the company. Communities warn:

"We will continue to demand for our land, our rights and the protection of our forests and local food systems whether from Pierre Vandebecck, the Belgian founder and CEO of SIAT group, or from the managers of Saroafrika. if they confirm the takeover of the company that has grabbed our land!"

These communities, undeterred by corporate might, remain devoted to safeguarding their rights and eradicating unfair practices by SIAT. They appeal to the global community to rally behind them, advocating for a fairer, sustainable future.

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