
[Nigeria: Environmentalist threatened for his denounces against Wilmar's oil palm plantations](#)

The Singapore based agribusiness giant Wilmar - is expanding its operations in Africa. It already has approximately 50,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in Ivory Coast, Uganda and Ghana. More recently it has expanded to Nigeria going into a joint venture with PZ Cussons to set up huge extensions of oil palm plantations in Cross River State in the south east region of the country while promising the creation of thousands of job opportunities.

“Such a project would bring enormous benefit to the country by creating employment and saving tremendous foreign exchange. So far we have acquired 35, 000 hectares of land and we would complete the development in about four years. We are willing to develop as much land as the government can give us and we will develop it at a speed and quality that has never been seen before. “We also assure the government and all concerned parties that we would do the development in compliance with all sustainability requirements,” (1) announced Wilmar's International chair when referring to the company's project in Nigeria.

However, since Wilmar started its operations it has created land conflicts with local communities and refuses to deal with the land claims that local farmers and lands owners have on the properties they have received in concessions.

Rainforest Resource & Development Center (RRDC) is an environmental organization from the mentioned region, who is working at the local level in trying to ensure that Wilmar's operations are transparent, responsible, and recognize the rights of indigenous peoples and communities, as well as comply with related laws and regulations. RRDC has denounced Wilmar at the RSPO (2) for several reasons among them for failing to reach an agreement with landlord communities, unlawful acquisition of land leases in the case of farmers under the Cross River State Agricultural and Rural Empowerment Scheme (CARE) failure to properly account and recognize migrant communities living in the old oil palm estates that were allowed to farm in the estate and have no customary rights over the land that will therefore receive no compensation, none commitment to transparency and none compliance with applicable municipal laws and regulations.

Despite the communities' claims and the RRDC's complaint filed at the RSPO, Wilmar continues with its operations of forestland destruction and planting of oil palm seedlings in defiance of applicable Nigerian Laws and regulations, and in total disregard to the RSPO Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production. For these reasons RRDC is on the eve of launching a lawsuit against both the company and the government.

Odey Oyama, RRDC director, which is at the forefront in the denounces against Wilmar, has very recently started to be subject of police harassment. As he said to WRM “It is not possible to pin point the exact cause of the recent police harassment; but it could have arisen from any of the issues in which I have been involved in my person or under the auspices of RRDC. There are three principal issues in which I am presently involved in my person and also as RRDC and they all relate to Wilmar operations in Cross River State. They have to do with Wilmar's disrespect to and violation to the laws of the country and the state, denounces that the plantation area is encroaching on the Oban Hill

Division of the Cross River National Park and Ekinta forest reserve and finally a denounce of corruption. By reason of SOME OR ALL or any of the above matters, I have recently experienced undue harassments from the Nigerian Police Force.”

As a result of his advocacy, Odey has been placed on a government watch list – a recognized signal that his life could be under threat – and has been forced to flee his home.

An international action alert has been organized to support Odey and other Nigerian environmentalists. The alert urges the Nigerian government officials to put an end to the threats to Odey Oyama and alert that the world is watching: Odey Oyama’s safety must be guaranteed, and the company must comply with national and international laws.

We invite you to join the alert by sending a letter to the relevant official at:

<http://www.foei.org/en/blog/stop-threats-to-nigerian-environmentalist-odey-oyama>

(1) <http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/21323>

(2) The full submission of complaint to RSPO in respect to Wilmar operations in Nigeria can be read at <http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2012/11/NGO%20Complaint%20to%20RSPO%20about%20Wilmar%20NPP%20in%20Nigeria.pdf>