Development Finance as Agro-Colonialism: European Development Bank funding of Feronia-PHC oil palm plantations in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The report ***Development Finance as Agro-Colonialism: European Development Bank funding of Feronia-PHC oil palm plantations in the Democratic Republic of Congo*** details abuses faced by communities affected by industrial oil palm plantations managed by the Congolese company *Plantations et Huileries du Congo* (PHC). Huge areas of community land were illegally seized in 1911 and palm groves turned into industrial oil palm plantations by PHC, a company set up by the co-founder of the global food company Unilever, Lord Leverhulme. Development banks have financed Feronia-PHC with over US$ 150 million since 2013. Abuses against local people in connection with the conflicts over the PHC occupation of their ancestral land have continued. A local land activist was killed and community members arbitrarily arrested in 2019.

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In 2020, the Canadian company operating the plantations, Feronia Inc., went bankrupt. Instead of seeking ways to give the land back to communities, the mostly European development banks agreed to write-off most of their loans and investments in the company and hand the PHC concession to the next company with no reported experience in growing oil palms.

Tired of empty promises, four communities at one of the plantation sites took over some 400 hectares of plantation abandoned by PHC in early 2020 and started their own palm oil processing. They have regained an autonomy and income levels never seen by those toiling as day labourers on the PHC plantations. “With access to these lands, we are able to resume our palm oil production, which was violently interrupted with colonisation”, a member of the community operation's management team said.

See this section on the WRM website for a collection of statements from communities affected by the Feronia-PHC plantations demanding restitution of their ancestral land.