
Cameroon: Testimony of women who reclaim their land back

On November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Association of Women Neighbouring SOCAPALM Edéa (AFRISE), from Cameroon, launched [a petition](#) to STOP the replanting of oil palm monocultures around their homes and vital spaces.

Here we share the testimony of Ms. Ngon Bissou Félicite Hortenseof, president of AFRISE, about the situation of the communities - and women in particular - whose territories have been invaded by SOCAPALM/SOCFIN company.

The audio is in French. Below, the transcript in English.

Transcript

Now let's talk about the petition. I, we women, AFRISE, are really affected. We are threatened. We are frustrated by SOCAPALM's re-planting [of oil palm plantations] that has been going on since this year. Because they are replanting right up to our houses..... our backyard, which has been planted for 50 years now. They pulled out these palm trees and are now replanting. Since last year, we've had this problem of re-planting. And now they're going to continue right behind out houses, supposedly in March or February-March. We're saying no to this re-planting.

That's why we've written this petition, so that it can be signed because we want space to live. We don't even have space to plant even some cassava here. We don't even have space to live. Not even space to live. We're already squeezed in, squeezed in on the other side [of the village] where we are living under high-voltage lines. We are living with these high-voltage lines all the time. We don't have any space to live. We need access to the land SOCAPALM is now cutting and have a space, not only to build, but to cultivate too, because you have to have a backyard where you can tend your palm grove. Where you can grow some macabo yourself. Where you can also grow plantain, have some vital space behind the house, to survive. Not just for ourselves, but for the next generations! What are the young people going to do? Where are they going to live, where are they going to go? So, we're demanding this space, really, not even for us, because we're leaving, we're leaving and what are we going to leave behind? How are we going to leave this behind? How are we going to leave it?

There's no life in Edéa, in Cameroon. No, we don't have life here. Because life without land is nothing. We want the land to survive. We want the vital space to build houses, to generate income for, for, for, for, for those coming, too. That's why we're reaching out to you, really. So that you can help us have this space. The land where our ancestors lived, because there are graves here, there are graves throughout this vital space! There are graves. How are we going to live? We no longer have any firewood. Our pharmacy is gone, too.

We are affected by chemical products every day! Instead of healing ourselves, we are affected. If you don't have wood, what are you going to do? So, we really need to have this vital space to grow our fields. Because when you have your cassava field, your cassava yield, you can buy gas. You can buy gas. You can send your children to school. So, the first thing is living space. We want living space to improve the lives of women surrounded by plantations. We want living space, also for her future generation. We really do!

The second thing to note is that we women are being abused by this company, we're really being abused because the state of our daily lives, the situation that leaves us weakened, pushes us to go into the plantations to fetch fallen nuts. When they cut, those nuts fall to the ground. It's these that we are talking about collecting, to extract oil, because it's with this money that we can lessen a little the burden on our daily lives, send the children in school, ensure medical care. And other things, etc. In their bush, we run into all kinds of people, we're abused, really! We are humiliated by SOCAPALM, by the administrative authorities, prisons here and there, fines here and there.

Women face being violated in all these places. There is no way to even enter her own palm grove without a friend in the plantation. Because of the trenches, that they say mark the boundaries of the land, we don't even have access to our rivers which are in the plantation. Someone like me, I found the tracks... that's where we used to go to drink water. Today, there are trenches that even deprive us of our rivers. We live like foreigners on our own land, even like foreigners on their land. They have freedom but we are not free. We are not free. This company on our land, we get nothing of their happiness, nothing of the development of the company. We know none of that. We don't have light or water. We don't have schools. We have nothing. Our children... they don't even give them work, no. Only as labourers, or guarding the palm nuts. To put us in conflict with our own brothers and our children and our husbands, all the time. So that's what it's all about. Thank you.