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## Communities stand up against corporate land grabs and State violence

This editorial is about the courage and determination of communities who are mobilizing to denounce and resist corporate control over community lands. Often, they face not only corporate violence and control over their lands but also tear gas, batons and state repression unleashed by governments resorting to ‘a greedy misinterpretation of “all land belongs to the State”’ to protect corporate interests. (1)

This is what has been happening in the Litoral region of Cameroon, where the community of Apouh à Ngog is opposing the replanting of industrial oil palm plantations on their ancestral lands by Socapalm, a Cameroonian subsidiary of the notorious multinational Socfin. For nearly 50 years, the company operations have been making life miserable for the community of Apouh à Ngog, whose original village site was eradicated by the corporate oil palm plantations decades ago.

As Socapalm replaces sections of old oil palm plantations, it not only ignores community requests for retrocession of vital spaces immediately around the village; the new company plantings are creeping even closer to the village edge. “If they do not stop these operations, the women who live close to Socapalm in Edéa will have to endure another 50 years of suffering, abuse, rape, theft, hunger, frustration and violation of our rights, our privacy and our dignity”. This is what the Association of Women Neighbouring SOCAPALM Edéa (**AFRISE**) explains in a petition calling for an end to this occupation of the village’s vital life spaces by RSPO-certified Socapalm. (2)

In January 2025, the women of AFRISE planted banana saplings on some 35 hectares of disputed land being prepared for replanting by Socapalm. The company sprayed the young banana plants with chemicals shortly after and on 24 March, returned under the protection of dozens of armed military personnel to continue the replanting. Overcoming fear and facing tear gas and batons, the community stood in the way of the company’s bulldozers, blocking the corporate replanting for days. As the company forged on with its planting, over 60 organisations called for an immediate stop to the continued corporate encroachment on the community’s ancestral lands. They also urged the government of Cameroon to guarantee vital living space for the community of Apouh à Ngog - instead of sending in armed military forces to protect the corporate interest of Socfin, a company that like few others epitomizes the colonial pattern of exploitation of the region.

It is also what has been happening in the municipality of Aracruz, in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo, where about 1000 women from the Rural Landless Workers' Movement (MST) took action to demand agrarian reform and against the multiple forms of violence perpetrated against women. (3) Under the slogan, “Agribusiness means violence and environmental crimes. The struggle of women is against capital”, they occupied land controlled by Suzano, the world’s largest exporter of wood pulp. For years, the company has gone about its business with impunity, amassing large areas of fertile land and committing violations against Indigenous Peoples, quilombola and landless peasant communities. In a press release, the MST points out that “Multinationals are not worried about obtaining land in order to solve the problem of hunger in the country” and that it would be possible to settle more than 100,000 families on the 2.7 million hectares of fertile land in Brazil that are held by Suzano. In 2011, Suzano agreed to provide 22 areas occupied by the corporation for settlements of

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landless peasants, but the company has been failing to comply with its commitment. Just as AFRISE in Apouh à Ngog, the women occupying the land in Aracruz vow to continue their struggle for land to grow food, as they, too, are confronted with a state siding with the company, not peasants. (4)

It is also what has been happening in Cote d'Ivoire, where 20 members of the indigenous Winnin community were arrested in December 2024. The Winnin have been voicing their opposition to the privatization of their ancestral lands at the Monogaga forest. (5) The Winnin have called these forests their home for more than six centuries. The Ivorian Ministry of Water and Forests, meanwhile, granted a concession to Roots Wild Foundation whose operations have already been causing conflict with the communities. The arrests and the threats to individuals of the Winnin prior to their detention highlight serious concerns about the criminalization of land defenders in the region.

It is also what is happening in Indonesia, in Papua, and across the Mekong region, as we read in two declarations we share in this edition of the bulletin. In Papua, the Solidaritas Merauke Movement came together to share stories of collective suffering and trauma caused by state-corporate crimes, especially in the name of what the government of Indonesia declared National Strategic Projects (PSN). The declaration, collectively prepared by the Solidaritas Merauke Movement, highlights community struggles against the dispossession of their living space by such state-corporate mega-projects that defile what communities hold sacred. In Thailand, communities from the Mekong region and Punan communities from North Kalimantan in Indonesia came together to exchange and learn about community struggles against mega-hydrodam projects. On the occasion of the International Day of Action Against Dams on 14 March, they reaffirm through a declaration the importance of standing together to show that “we are united and firm in the collective struggle to defend our rivers, forests and futures from false green solutions and corporate greed”.

In an interview with WRM in 2018, a leader of the Akroá-Gamela Peoples in Brazil explains why despite the fear of state repression and violence from greedy corporations, communities stand strong in the struggle to reclaim their ancestral lands: “*because it is a sacred place; it is a place that gives meaning to our existence.*” (6)

Because land gives meaning to their existence, communities are standing up against corporate violence and governments’ *greedy misinterpretation of “all land belongs to the State”*. In Apouh à Ngog, Aracruz and the many other places, communities are organizing to protect and reclaim the lands of their ancestors - The struggle continues!

## **WRM Secretariat**

- (1) [WRM Bulletin 241. 2018. A Reflection from Africa: Conquer the Fear for Building Stronger Movements.](#)
- (2) [Petition. Cameroon: Testimony of women who reclaim their land back.](#)
- (3) [Against capital and patriarchy, MST women hold day of struggle and occupy Suzano-owned eucalyptus plantations in Brazil.](#)
- (4) Brasil de Fato. 2025. [Justiça determina despejo de ocupação de mulheres do MST em área da Suzano no ES.](#)
- (5) Mongabay. 2025. [Des leaders communautaires emprisonnés après s’être opposés à la privatisation controversée d’une forêt classée en Côte d’Ivoire.](#)
- (6) [WRM Bulletin 241. 2018. Brazil: I am Kum’tum, I am of the Akroá-Gamela People.](#)

