

Press release – May 27th 2019

**BOLLORE GROUP SUED BY NGOS
IN AN UNPRECEDENTED LEGAL ACTION**

Palm oil in Cameroon: French courts must order the group to respect its commitments for residents and workers of the Socapalm plantations

While the palm oil plantations of Socfin, a company of the Bolloré group, brings 306 million euros in turnover in 2018, Bolloré refuses to implement measures to improve the living and working conditions on its plantations in Cameroon, measures it had agreed upon in 2013.

“Palm oil industry have a devastating impact throughout the world on health, pollution, deforestation, and workers' rights, but no action seems to have succeeded so far in shaking up the practices of agribusiness giants. Thus, our organizations are asking the courts to enforce these fundamental rights” says Sandra Cossart, Sherpa's director.

Today, in a **pathbreaking legal action**, Sherpa and European and Cameroonian organizations ReAct, GRAIN, FIAN-Belgium, Bread for all, SYNAPARCAM, FODER, SNJP, l'Amicale des Riverains d'Edéa and the trade union SATAM **are filing a lawsuit against BOLLORE S.A. before the Nanterre court for the implementation of an action plan in Cameroon.**

Our civil lawsuit aims to ask the French judge to force the Bolloré group to comply with the commitments it made in 2013 to the local communities and plantation workers of Socapalm, a Cameroonian palm oil company directly linked to the group.

In 2010, Sherpa filed a complaint before the OECD National Contact Point (NCP) regarding Socapalm's activities. This complaint denounced the violence committed by the security company hired by Socapalm and the social, environmental and land problems of the residents and plantation employees. After several months of mediation, the Bolloré group and Sherpa agreed on the implementation in Cameroon of an **action plan in order to improve the living and working conditions of the affected communities.**

In December 2014, the Bolloré group suddenly announced that it would not implement the action plan and offloaded its responsibilities on Socfin, another Socapalm shareholder.

Since then, local communities have been mobilized but their demands remain unanswered.

The French and Belgian NCPs have asked the companies to respect their commitments, without success. These non-binding OECD mechanisms have therefore reached the limits of their power in this case.

We are now asking the French judge to order the forced execution of the action plan; it must be considered as a contract that has not yet been executed.

We are hoping that the 28 and 29 May Socfin and Bolloré's General Assembly will be an opportunity for shareholders to take decisions regarding respect of the environment and human rights in Cameroon and in their plantations around the world.

"This action should be an important step in increasing the accountability of economic actors, who cannot unilaterally withdraw from their commitments, nor take them for the sole purpose of buying social peace or an ethical image. Law should not remain a tool for the powerful of the world" says Marie-Laure Guislain, head of litigation at Sherpa.

Despite Bolloré group's repeated defamation proceedings against Sherpa, ReAct and many others¹, **we claim the right to hold a multinational company liable.**

The conditions under which companies carry out their activities abroad while trying to maintain total irresponsibility are part of the public interest debate.

Press Contact

Marie-Laure Guislain, head of litigation – Sherpa: 06 47 11 65 06 / juriste.gdh@asso-sherpa.org

Field Code Changed

¹ Our press release on the Bolloré SLAPP suits : <https://www.asso-sherpa.org/bollore-slapp-suits-socfin-and-socapalm-withdrew-their-appeal-in-the-defamation-proceedings-against-sherpa-react-and-mediapart>

Field Code Changed