

## Position of Socapalm

An article published on the website of the newspaper « de [VOLKSKRANT](#) », on 29 May 2021, accuses Socapalm of land grabbing, violence against women and questions the independence of the auditors and the initiated RSPO certification process ([Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil](#)). We would like to clarify certain elements that were raised by this newspaper.

Following the publication of this article, we regret that the information that was shared with the newspaper de VOLKSKRANT was mostly not taken into account. This publication only pays very little attention to the transmitted factual and detailed elements, which clearly underline **the strict application of our commitments, our transparency and our willingness to work together on a daily basis to develop responsible tropical agriculture.**

We note that the article tries to equate the investment ethics of certain banks, by ignoring to present solutions, action plans, monitoring and verification systems on the ground, and to accept the existence of a sustainable, stringent and recognised certification system: RSPO.

We therefore want to clarify the situation and provide more information:

**Respecting our contractual commitment to the State of Cameroon as well as maintaining good neighbourly relations with the communities living in and around our plantations is of utmost importance for us.** In fact, Socapalm uses the land made available by the State of Cameroon under a 60-year emphyteutic lease. Originally, the leased area was 78 529 hectares. This was reviewed in 2005 and an area of 20 785 hectares was returned to the State of Cameroon. In order to clarify the land issue, which causes tension, and to avoid any misunderstanding, an inventory of the concession has started already two years ago in close collaboration with the State, through the local land registry services, and the affected local communities. This inventory, at the initiative of Socapalm, is undertaken on all plantations and requires in certain cases the placement of new or additional boundary markers to limit the concession. This inventory makes it possible to:

- Clarify possible encroachments of the company outside the concession and intrusions, illegal occupations of third parties within the concession.
- Improve good neighbourly relations between the communities and the plantation company.
- Reduce the area covered by the lease between Socapalm and the State, for which Socapalm pays annual rent.

To help realize this project, a commission has been set up within the Ministry of Domains, Land Registry and Land Affairs to examine the land situation; its objective is to assist us in our efforts and to conduct field visits if necessary.

We recognise that we are confronted with a strong demographic growth, but we would like to remind you that the State of Cameroon is the legitimate landowner and as such the only one with the authority to change the concession boundaries or to return land to the communities.

**Secondly, Socapalm applies a zero-tolerance policy on harassment, violence against women, and this within its own workforce and within teams of subcontractors and temporary workers, and of course, teams in charge of security.** In fact, Socapalm is strongly opposed and has implemented action to this end: publication of a human rights policy, of a policy on sexual harassment and violence at the workplace, and implementation of an internal and external grievance management system. Moreover, Socapalm put in place a structure and staff dedicated to improving the relations with the local communities. « Gender committees » serve as a dialogue platform for topics related to

discrimination and sexual harassment. Employees, communities and subcontractors are regularly educated on the company's commitments, policies and grievance management systems. Moreover, in view of the recurrent allegations of sexual harassment and rape, this issue was subject to a specific audit of the SCS Global Services auditors during their certification audits on the first two plantations; during this specific audit, no evidence was found to support these allegations.

Socapalm and the Socfin Group selected an RSPO auditor firm from [several certification auditor firms](#), accredited by Assurance Services International (ASI), **recognised and educated by RSPO**. These experts conducted their mission impartially and independently as any professional in this business. Socapalm offered accommodation to these experts during their plantation visit, taking into account the rural environment of the Mbongo and Mbambou plantations. In fact, there is no touristic infrastructure available offering accommodation in the vicinity of these plantations.

As required by the ethics of the profession and their mission, a large number of stakeholders were consulted during the audit and more specifically with respect to the social aspect. Additionally, not one member of the plantation's management team participated in the meetings with the stakeholders. And lastly, the team of expert consultants had its own means of transport, they did not use a vehicle of Socapalm. The experts drafted their program without consulting Socapalm, in complete independence. SCS Global Service has furthermore defended its position in [a statement addressed to the NGO Milieudefensie](#).

Contrary to the image depicted in this article, we want our palm oil and rubber production activities to be to the benefit of all: our employees, smallholders and communities, by improving their living conditions. Our mission is to initiate or boost long-term socio-economic development of isolated rural areas, while strengthening and protecting communities' rights, quality of life and the environment.

[Click here](#) for more information on Socapalm's commitment to sustainable development in Cameroon.