

# Socfin/Bolloré plantations: rising profits, ongoing repression

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Collective press release | 25 May 2022 [\[FR\]](#)

## **Socfin/Bolloré plantations: rising profits, ongoing repression**

From Sierra Leone to Nigeria, through Cameroon, Guinea and Ivory Coast, communities living near the industrial palm oil and rubber plantations of Socfin/Bolloré are fighting for their rights and against repression.

On 25 and 31 May 2022, the Bolloré and Socfin groups will hold their annual meetings online amidst rising profits. Socfin's profits exploded in 2021 to reach 80.4 million euros, its highest figure since at least 2014 due to increasing prices for palm oil and rubber.[1] These high profits are likely to continue in 2022 as the war in Ukraine has cut sunflower oil supplies and increased global demand and the price of palm oil. In 2021, the Bolloré Group, which owns nearly 40% of Socfin, also booked a staggering profit of 6 billion euros.

These profits come at a high cost for communities living near the plantations. In particular, the company's rush to get its plantations certified as "sustainable" is leading to a lot of trouble on the ground. Local communities were quite shocked to learn that Socfin had hired an international consultancy (SCS Global) to audit its African plantations in order to obtain the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certificate, despite many land conflicts and unresolved social and environmental issues.

Last July, local communities in Cameroon held a press conference to protest against the certification awarded to Socfin's subsidiary Safacam by the RSPO. As Emmanuel Elong, a leader of the local organization Synaparcam, put it: "Safacam does not comply with various social and environmental RSPO criteria". At least two community members reported intimidation related to the audit.[2] In Ivory Coast where Socfin has its SOGB plantations, village chiefs and the Association of Displaced Villages also publicly expressed their opposition to SOGB's certification because of unresolved land issues.[3]

In March 2022, the Sierra Leonean organization MALOA issued a petition objecting to the certification of Socfin's SAC plantation by RSPO. 1,475 community members signed, stating that a lot of issues were "in total contradiction to the RSPO criteria and were wrongly assessed by the auditors".[4] Signatories now report that they are being harassed: "Land owners and chiefs who speak against the bad operations of the company or do not support the human rights abuses of the company are arrested by the police or removed as chiefs,"[5] explains a member of MALOA.

Earlier this month, the community of Marioba neighboring the Okomu Oil Palm Company in Nigeria staged a peaceful protest because the company dug a massive trench along the road between their village and the plantation. Villagers are concerned that children will fall into the trench. The company says it is needed to prevent people from stealing palm fruits, which it alleges amounts to 50 tonnes per month. During the protest, police tried to disperse the protesters. A 64-year old widow, Iyabo Butu was hit by a bullet in the knee. [6] She needs urgent medical care and may face difficulty continuing to fish and farm. Okomu's net profit tripled last year and has doubled again in the first quarter of this year. "You talk, you will be arrested. You protest to make your voice heard, you will be shot. Now our future is in danger. How long shall we continue to endure and accept these practices of profit above human dignity?" asks Sunday Ajele, a local leader.

Socfin also provides managerial services to other plantations ridden with conflicts, as with Soguipah in Guinea.[7] In December 2021, Soguipah workers went on strike to protest against bad working conditions and unpaid wages, and their grievances have still not been resolved. Yet, Socfin has just announced that it will cease working with Soguipah by the end of this year.

Companies like Socfin extract immense profits from the lands and labour of communities in Africa and Asia. Bolloré's continuous involvement in Socfin despite alleged human rights abuses, unresolved land conflicts and greenwashing practices is unacceptable. "We will never stop fighting for our land and we will continue to resist the repression led by Socfin and Bolloré to silence us" says Emmanuel Elong.

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**Signatories:**

Action Solidarité Tiers Monde (Luxembourg)  
Creatives for Justice (Suisse)  
Environmental Rights Action - Friends of the Earth (Nigéria)  
Fian Belgium (Belgique)  
GRAIN (international)  
Green Scenery (Sierra Leone)  
HEKS Swiss Church Aid (Suisse)  
Justiciz (Liberia)  
Milieudefensie - Friends of the Earth (Pays-Bas)  
Oakland Institute (Etats-Unis)  
Public Eye (Suisse)  
ReAct Transnational (France)  
Rettet den Regenwald - Rainforest Rescue (Allemagne)  
SOS Faim (Luxembourg)  
Synaparcam (Cameroun)

1 Socfin Annual Report 2021, older annual reports.

2 Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement/Friends of the Earth Cameroon, Press Release, July 1st, 2021.

3 Association des Villages Déplacés (AVD), Statement by the village leaders and the AVD executive board [French], August 17th, 2021.

4 Malen Affected Land Owners and Users Association, Petition objecting the RSPO certification of Socfin Sierra Leone, March 10th, 2022.

5 Green Scenery, Press Release, May 6th, 2022.

6 Nigerian News Agency, "Palm Oil Company, host community tango over digging of trench to stop fruit theft", May 6th 2022 & The Sun, "Edo communities protest Okomu oil palm company over alleged marginalisation, oppression", May 5th 2022.

7 Farmlandgrab.org, "Socfin: Troubles in Guinea", May 18th 2022.



ReAct et al.

- 25 May 2022