

OKOMU OIL PALM COMPANY PLC IMPACTED COMMUNITIES OF EDO STATE.

Abi Quarters, Okomu Community

**Ovia South West Local Government Area
Edo State, Nigeria.**

Email: okomucommu@gmail.com

Tel: +234-7036426530.

Your Excellency,

4th September, 2020.

President Muhammadu Buhari

President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces

Federal Republic of Nigeria

Government House, Aso Rock

Abuja, Nigeria.

Dear Sir,

SOCFIN AND HER SUBSIDIARY OKOMU OIL PALM COMPANY PLC RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN EDO STATE COMMUNITIES/VILLAGES: AN S.O.S.

The Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc was established in 1976 as a federal government project and was privatized in 1979. Now, the Socfin Group is the majority owner.

The activities of the company over the years have been characterized by violations of citizens rights. Some of the violations accusations against Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc ranges from locking out citizens of their host communities from the entrance to their communities to harassment of outspoken indigenes of their host communities with security agencies, circumvention of the global principles of free, prior and informed consent, land grabbing, destruction of citizens livelihoods, use of brute force and military might to dislodge, dislocate and disperse villages and settlements within their areas of operation. In all of these, citizens fundamental rights are thrown over board. In years past, Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc security forces in collaboration with men of the Nigerian Army have burnt down and dispersed villagers of Agbede, Oweike, Lehmon and recently on the 20th day of May, 2020 the village of Ijaw-Gbene on flimsy excuses and at this time of corona virus pandemic. We understand that the company may claim to be contributing to the Edo State Government's Internally Generated Revenue, but at what expense? We cannot continue to accept a practice of profit above humans syndrome that has been typical of the operations of Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc/SOCFIN groups in Nigeria and Africa. Business must respect human rights and where these are in danger, the government must protect her citizens and remedy must be provided for victims, after all, Nigeria not only supported but also promoted the promulgation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc should not be allowed to continue to act with impunity!

A report published in 2017¹ shows how the company encroached on forest reserves and customary lands without consent or adequate compensation to the impacted communities. This land grabbing and forest destruction has put the livelihoods of over 60'000 forest-dependent people on the edge and increasing hunger and social conflicts. The report exemplifies both human rights violations as well as biodiversity destruction and water pollution. The report also analyses breaches of the Forestry Laws of Nigeria, among others, and occupation of part of the land illegally by the company.

Your Excellency Sir, based on the above, we humbly make the following requests:

1. A holistic and independent investigation into the acquisition of the large acres of the reserved and other community lands by Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc.
2. An investigation into the use of military and their security forces to destroy their host villages especially the recent one that occurred on the 20th May, 2020.
3. That the company be directed to stop forthwith any form of attacks on their host villages/communities but should treat them as equal stakeholders and immediately unlock the gates that are the entrance and exit routes for communities liaising with them on how to secure the access routes.
4. That the perpetrators who burnt down Agbede, Oweike, Lehmon and Ijaw-Gbene should be fished out and brought to book and adequate compensations/damages paid to the victims of those violent destructions.
5. That in the interim, you use your good offices to direct the provision of relief materials for the people of Ijaw-Gbene who are the most recent victims in terms of food, clothes, utensils and shelter.
6. In the long-term, the Government should thoroughly investigate the disrespect of the law by the Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc. especially as it relates to lack of due process in the acquisition of some of the lands where they have their plantations and where found culpable, the company should be compelled to leave the illegally occupied land with other deterrent and punitive sanctions imposed.
7. The Government should ensure that Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc stop forthwith their destruction, pays compensation for the destructions and losses caused to the communities as well as general and exemplary damages for the biodiversity destructions.

It is our further humble request Your Excellency that:

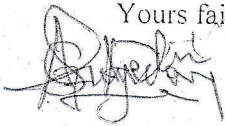
- Before any further development of oil palm or rubber production, a negotiation, survey, documentation and a genuine environmental and social impact assessment must be immediately carried out on the entire land occupied by Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc. A failure to do so and to abide by the new terms should earn the company a status of an illegal occupier.
- Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is an internationally enforceable right, therefore Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc should go back to status quo ante to right the wrongs against Okomu communities or vacate the area totally.
- Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc must urgently rebuild and reinstate the four communities forcefully evicted, restore the environment and properties extirpated and pay compensation for the farms and crops destroyed in all their communities and villages impacted by their operations.

¹ Uwaka, Rita, Chima Williams and Nosa Tokunbor (2017), «Deforestation, Land Grabbing in Edo State – Impacts of Okomu Oil Palm Plc operations on Community Lands and the Environment», published by Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria

- Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc should conduct a medical check and treatment for the people of Okomu communities as a result of the pollution of the creek due to the agrochemicals used for the development of their palms and rubbers.
- Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc must as a matter of urgency return the boats, fishing traps and hooks seized from the 35 women for their sustainable economic livelihood and pay compensation immediately.
- That henceforth promises made by the Company in the area of health, education, road and employment must be fulfilled, and a yearly cooperate social responsibilities must be agreed on with a time frame attached via a well-documented Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
- Failure to comply with the above, Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc must be held responsible for any break down of law and order that might arise as a result of the non compliance.

Your Excellency Sir, we are available, willing and ready to provide further information and evidence where needed as we await your fatherly favourable response to our above humble requests.

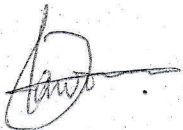
Yours faithfully,



Chief Ajele Sunday
Okomu Community
07036428530



Lemon muyenaki Mike
Agbede Community
09032026839



Engr. Lawani Durofaye
Agbede Community
09065802367.



Chief Mercy Yanbar
Okomu Community
08166725424



Comr. Lemon Justin
Makilolo Community
07035552786



Edema Godstime
Oweike Community
08105262340



CHIEF SEGUN EIUEYI
GBELEBU COMMUNITY
08154912533



JOSEPH O. MIYANI
IJAIGBENE COMMUNITY
08109240492



REX AKPOKINIOVO
AT&P Community
08034420500

Mrs. Magrete Igbege
Ijawbene Community

08034598947

~~Mr.~~

OGIDI Rufus

OZALLA Community

08168030201

~~Ed~~

OJO EDWARD

OZALLA Community

07031206238

~~Chris~~

Chrisana IDOLOGBE

Okor-community

07066220529

~~John~~

Akhibe John

EKpan Community

~~June~~

Ikutu Juliet
Ugere Community
08189160322



Eberumeifo Aiyesoro

Oke - Ihuu Community

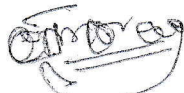
07033357015



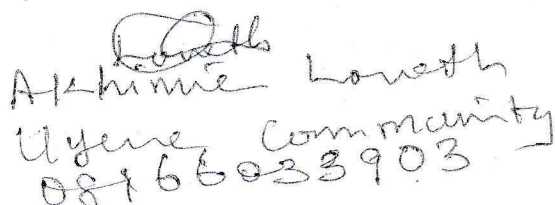
Anthony Igharo
Odiguetue Community
08184269285



AIDOOGUE MARCUS
Odiguetue Community
08168467847



Omereybe Joseph
Unokpe Community
08137972020


Akhime Loveth
Ugere Community
08166033903

Cc:

His Excellency,

Governor Godwin Obaseki

The Governor of Edo State
Government House, Osadebe Avenue,
Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

Distinguished Senator Ahmed Lawan

Senate President, Federal Republic of Nigeria
National Assembly Complex
Three Arms Zone, F.C.T. Abuja

Rt. Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila

Hon. Speaker, House of Representatives
Federal Republic of Nigeria
National Assembly Complex
Three Arms Zone, F.C.T. Abuja.

HRM OmoN'Oba n'Edo Ukuapolokpolo

Oba Ewuare II
The Oba of Benin
Oba's Palace, Benin City.

The Commissioner of Police
Edo State Police Command
Benin City.

The Director of State Security Service
Edo State Command
Benin City.

Sir for your information and necessary action.