

Polo Congressmen submit complaint to international body against Germán Efromovich's economic group.

Congressmen Iván Cepeda, Alirio Uribe y Alberto Castilla, alongside ASOCOL and ASOCADAR-associations of small farmers displaced from the former Hacienda Bellacruz in Cesar, Colombia-submitted a formal complaint to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) against Extractora La Gloria, an ordinary member of the RSPO. The company, part of the Hacienda La Gloria Agro-Industrial Group, is seeking RSPO certification. Its stockholders include Germán Efromovich, owner of the airline Avianca, and Carlos Murgas, former agriculture minister and honorary member of Fedepalma.

Bogotá, November 18, 2015. The complaint submitted by Congressmen Iván Cepeda, Alirio Uribe and Alberto Castilla of the Alternative Democratic Pole (*Polo*) political party, is based on Hacienda La Gloria Agro-Industrial Business Group's failure to honour its commitment to comply with business and human rights standards, the United Nations Global Compact, and the RSPO Principles and Criteria.

The document was sent to the XIII Annual Conference of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil in Kuala Lumpur. The facts underlying the complaint are in apparent contradiction to the RSPO's objectives on issues like transparency. According to the congressmen, La Gloria's complex corporate structure makes it impossible to know the identities of the business group's investors. Furthermore, the businesses that comprise the group are based in the Cayman Islands and Panama, which are both considered tax havens. The congressmen affirm that the business group has not declared itself publicly, deliberately ignoring corporate and tax regulations that prevent tax evasion.

The small farmers displaced from Bellacruz are currently covered by protective measures authorized by the Constitutional Court. However, they also face a legal battle led by the Hacienda La Gloria Agro-Industrial Group, which aims to unlawfully hold onto 1,500 hectares of fallow land that belong to the people. Displaced farmers have claimed these plots since the early 1990s.

The RSPO's purpose is to promote palm oil production and use according to criteria of environmental, social and economic sustainability. The roundtable was formed in 2004 at the initiative of Indonesian and Malaysian palm oil companies, alongside the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Since 2007, Fedepalma in Colombia has encouraged its members to adopt the initiative.

Despite the RSPO's goal of creating sustainability standards for the palm industry, several companies have been accused of human rights violations. These include violations of workers' rights, as in the case

of Felda Global Ventures in Malaysia and Liberia, and a lack of transparency, as seen with OLAM in Gabon. Environmental problems have also been documented, notably the Indonesian case of Kalimantan Sawit Abadi and Sawit Mandiri Lestari (SML), subsidiaries of Sawit Sumbermas Sarana and Bumitama, financed by Rabobank. Finally, palm oil companies have been accused of irregular land acquisition and accumulation practices, as well as a lack of free, prior and informed consent, as occurred with Sime Darby and Golden Agri-Resources in Liberia.

Felda Global Ventures' clients include the U.S. company Cargill, which used 36 joint-stock companies to amass 39 plots of land in Vichada Department, Colombia. The plots, measuring 52,576 hectares, were originally part of the agricultural reform process. These corporate practices concentrate land and reverse the nascent achievements of land allocation to small farmers, to the detriment of victims of displacement and others human rights violations. Other companies, such as Aceites Manuelita S.A. in San Carlos and Poligrow in Mapiripán (municipalities in Meta Department, Colombia), have employed similar methods. The Democratic Pole has also denounced these cases in the Congress of the Republic.

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