

69th ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

15 November – 5 December, Banjul, Gambia, Virtual session

ITEM 5 – Activity Reports of the Members of the Commission & Special Mechanisms (Working Group on Extractive Industries)

Speaker: James G. Otto, International Service for Human Rights (53)

Thank you, Mister Chairperson for the presentation of your report.

ISHR and its partner the Liberian civil society Oil Palm Working Group appreciate the opportunity to speak on the 69th session of the African Commission on Peoples' and Human Rights.

Globally, Agro-Commodities is one of the most dangerous sectors for Environmental Human Rights Defenders. In Liberia this is no different. Four industrial palm oil plantations mostly backed by international financiers, hold licenses of over 1.6 million hectares of fertile agriculture land in Liberia.

Local customary communities are engulfed by the companies' plantations thus impacting their livelihoods, polluting their environment and destroying their forests. They are coerced into signing unrealistic land agreements with below standard compensation for destroyed crops. Local farmers and environmental human rights defenders who protest against land grabs and other rights violations as a result of the companies' expansion activities are criminalized with arbitrary arrests and detention. Chemicals from the plantations pollute the water and soil of these communities, sources of drinking water and fishing are gone and forests and farmlands destroyed.

After a decade of resistance from local communities affected by agri-business, it is time that institutions such as the ACHPR step up their involvement to promote and protect human rights in Liberia. Given that the Government of Liberia is not enforcing compliance with laws and contracts from concession holders. While the Land Rights Bill is a landmark opportunity to formalise local communities land rights. And relevant international developments provide for enhanced intervention, including the recognition of the Right to a Healthy Environment and the recent pledges from world leaders during the Climate COP to halt deforestation.

We ask the Working group on Extractive Industries

- Call upon the Government of Liberia to address the human rights and environmental harms in the agro-business sector by: a) taking action on the national action plan for business and human rights and b) ensuring the government implements the Land Rights Bill to formalise land rights.
- Update the previous report on the impact of extractive industries that included Liberia
- Take note of reports by Liberian Civil Society on harms in the agri-business sector and call upon involved financiers and companies to address and prevent those.
- Engage with the new commissioners of the Liberian Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) and support them in their important tasks to ensure human rights are promoted, protected, and respected in the agri-business sector.

We foresee a trend of escalating abuses if the sector is not regulated and controlled in the near future as the issues of land and food sovereignty grow stronger.