
[Indonesia: conflict over oil palm plantations](#)

Since the Indonesian government wants this country to become the first world exporter of oil palm --overcoming Malaysia-- this industry is currently undergoing a boom. To face the negative effects that oil palm plantations are producing at the local level on the environment and on peasants and their livelihoods, last July a group of Indonesian NGOs created Sawit Watch (see WRM bulletin nr. 14). Several actions have since then been carried out.

Oil palm plantation companies PT Batanghari Sawit Sejahtera (BSS) and PT Dasa Anugerah Sejati (DAS) expropriated lands of people in Tanjung Katung and Lubuk Bernai villages in Jambi province, in Sumatra. Local people are now demanding that the Ministry withdraw the license given to those companies. M. Haris Yatim, one of the villagers, said that PT DAS expropriated lands of the people with help from the military and local government officials, by intimidating villagers. Protesters also met the Agrarian Minister and Head of the National Board for Lands. At the meeting the Minister offered them to work as contract farmers of the estate owned by PT. DAS. Taking into account that this scheme --aimed at cash crops, including oil palm-- has resulted in the deprivation of small farmers of control over their land and production factors, they rejected this offer and reaffirmed their demand of getting back their lands. The Minister then promised them to send a fact-finding team.

After waiting for a whole week, and in the absence of an effective response, people from eight villages went to the House of Representatives of Jambi Province. Once again they received promises that a team would be sent to the conflict area as soon as possible.

At the same time, local villagers have been trying to negotiate directly with PT DAS. Both parties agreed to go to court to settle the dispute. The company however --with assistance from the police-- started to intimidate the farmers who had taken the case to court. During these intimidatory actions some of them were even arrested under the false accusation of stealing rubber in plantation areas of PT DAS.

Several demonstrations have been programmed by Sawit Watch for September all over the country, from Jakharta to Bali, to protest against the expansion of oil palm plantations.

Source: Sawit Watch: Campaign Against Big Scale Oil Palm Plantations in Indonesia, September 1998.