
Ivory Coast: Tanoé Swamps Forest under destruction by Unilever/Palm-Ci's oil palm plantations

The Tanoé Swamps Forest, in the department of Adiaké, is the very last remaining forest block in the south-eastern corner of Côte d'Ivoire and extends in an area that has been classified by conservation experts as being, among other things, of high importance for the conservation of mammals and birds, and of very high importance for the conservation of fresh water ecosystems. It is considered a High Value Forest and a major refuge for primates like the threatened Miss Waldron red colobus (*Piliocolobus badius waldronae*), the diana roloway (*Cercopithecus diana roloway*) and the white-napped mangabey (*Cercocebus atys lunulatus*).

The swamps of the Tanoé Forest have acted up to now as a powerful “shield” that has protected the forest from major aggressions. The forest extends along the sub-prefectures of Noah, Nouamou and Tiapoum, and the bordering villages of Kongodjan Tanoé, Kadjakro, Yao-Akakro, Kotouagnouan, Dohouan, Atchimanou, Saykro and Nouamou. Villagers regard it as their reserve of fishing, medicinal and food resources. (1)

Since February 2008, the palm oil company PALM-CI has begun destroying this 6,000 hectare centre of biodiversity to convert it to oil palm plantations. They are currently building drainage systems at the periphery and, once the rainy season is over, they intend to clearcut all of the forest.

If the Tanoé Forest is destroyed, the three primate species -as well as many plant species- will almost certainly become globally extinct, and large amounts of carbon dioxide will be released from the carbon-rich swamp forests.

Drainage systems are being built in order to produce seedbeds of palm tree seedlings on approximately 5 hectares of land between Kongodjan Tanoé and Kadjakro –a situation that according to many observers may arouse another land conflict before long in the department of Adiaké, since local communities have said that they are ready to defend the forest's integrity.

Unilever --one of the world's leading food and personal care consumer brands-- has been a long-term investor in PALM-CI and is represented on the company's board. They are stakeholders in a joint venture, Newco, which is the main customer of PALM-CI. Unilever publicly presents itself as a “responsible” palm oil company, being chair of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). It announces that it intends to only buy palm oil certified as sustainable and has recently even said that it will support a moratorium on rainforest and peatland destruction in Indonesia. Are Africa's rainforests less important for Unilever than Indonesia's? (2)

Despite years of membership in the RSPO and proclamations about “sustainability”, Unilever has so far not stopped purchasing palm oil grown on deforested land, drained peatland, or at the expense of communities and food production. Unilever continues to profit from the expansion of oil palm monocultures, which are intrinsically unsustainable, and certified palm oil “is unsubstantiated greenwash”. (3)

Article based on: (1) “Adiake : 6 000 ha de forêt menacés de disparition”, Moussa Touré, <http://news.abidjan.net/article/?n=294294>;

(2) “Action Alert: Unilever Threatens Côte d'Ivoire's Primary Rainforests, Showing Promises of ‘Sustainable’ Palm Oil Meaningless”, By Rainforest Portal, <http://www.rainforestportal.org/> and Climate Ark, <http://www.climateark.org/> , June 2, 2008;

(3) “Rainforest alert”, Rainforest Portal, June 2, 2008, http://www.ecoearth.info/alerts/send.asp?id=ivory_coast_oil_palm