

Campaigners to hand over more than 10,000 signatures for release of Indonesian palm oil campaigner

EU Renewable Energy Directive implicated in Human Rights Abuse in Sumatra

Joint press release by Biofuelwatch, Down to Earth, Rettet den Regenwald e.V. Watch Indonesia!

On Friday, 13th February, environmental and human rights campaigners will deliver a petition with over 10,000 signatures to the Indonesian embassy in London (1). On the same day, German campaigners will also deliver the signatures to the Indonesian embassy in Berlin. They are demanding the release of a community leader and village head in Jambi province, Sumatra, and redress for a community whose land has been illegally taken over by a palm oil company. A copy of the letter will be sent to the UK government.

This apparently unlawful arrest is linked to a growing number of land conflicts over palm oil in Indonesia. According to WALHI (Friends of the Earth Indonesia), there are more than one thousand oil palm related land conflicts in the country and an increasing number of human rights abuses linked to such conflicts are being reported.

Marianne Klute from Watch Indonesia! states "The Indonesian government must guarantee the human and land rights of local communities in Jambi province and elsewhere in the country, whose rights and livelihoods are threatened by oil palm companies."

Deepak Rughani from Biofuelwatch adds: "The underlying cause for this and many other conflicts in Indonesia and many other countries is the completely unsustainable and growing demand for palm oil, particularly in Europe. Europe's newly agreed biofuel targets and in the UK agrofuel and energy company Blue NG plans to also build a series of vegetable oil power plants in the UK will seriously worsen this situation".

The detained village head of Karang Mendapo village in Jambi had helped his community reclaim their own land from one of South-east Asia's largest plantation companies, Sinar Mas, last August. Villagers have been persecuted and intimidated since that time. Sinar Mas has been implicated in other human rights abuses, including, last December, in the fire-bombing of another village in Sumatra (2).

The EU has recently agreed a 10% renewable energy target for road transport, which is considered to be a biofuel target in all but name. European politicians decided that evictions and human rights abuses, no matter how serious, cannot be used as a ground for classing biofuels as 'unsustainable' or for countries such as the UK to refuse to support them.

In the UK, a planning application for the first power plant to burn vegetable oil was recently granted to the company Blue NG, which intends to submit initially seven more applications with plans for a further 36 such plants having been quoted in the media. Those plans would further increase the UK's demand for vegetable oil and thus, directly or indirectly, for palm oil.

Photo opportunity: 11.10 am, outside the Indonesian embassy, 38 Grosvenor Square, London

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Notes:

(1) A copy of the petition can be found at www.regenwald.org/protestaktion.php?id=357 . The number of signatures includes participants from the German and English language web pages of Rettet den Regenwald e.V.

(2) For more information about the fire-bombing in Sumatra, see www.regenwald.org/international/englisch/protestaktion.php?id=345

(3) The Renewable Energy Directive was agreed by Member States and by the European Parliament in December 2008. It includes very limited environmental 'sustainability standards' but bars all Member States from 'discriminating' against any biofuels because of human rights abuses, evictions or inhumane working conditions. For background information see <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/eudecision.php>