

[Skip to main content](#) [Skip to footer](#)



[Oakland Institute](#)

Reframing the Debate Inspiring Action

- [f](#)
- [t](#)
- [i](#)
- [y](#)
- [in](#)
- [p](#)

[Donate](#)

▼ [ABOUT](#)

- [Board](#)
- [Team](#)
- [Fellows](#)
- [Intern Scholars](#)
- [Partnerships](#)
- [Recognition](#)

Legal battles escalate between shareholders of PHC oil palm plantations in DRC

- [ISSUES](#)
- [Land Rights](#)
- [High Food Price Crisis](#)
- [AI](#)
- [F](#)
- [Systems](#)
- [Equity](#)
- [Climate Crisis](#)
- [W](#)
- [D](#)
- [C](#)

February 29, 2024



Walé Adeosun and Dr. Bokanga in Kinsasha, DRC. Source: Actualite.cd

---FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE---

February 29, 2024, 4:00 PM PST

Media Contacts:

Frédéric Mousseau, fmousseau@oaklandinstitute.org, +1 510-512-5458

Jean-François Mombia Atuku, jfmombia.at16@gmail.com

- Several legal battles are raging between shareholders for the control of the Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC) oil palm plantations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
- Following a case started in Delaware in 2021, the latest lawsuit filed in Mauritius accuses Walé Adeosun, Founder and Chief Investment Officer of Kuramo Capital Management, of fraud and money laundering and seeks to remove him from his role within PHC's holding company.
- While top executives stand accused of multimillion dollar fraud, communities living near the plantations suffer from being deprived of their lands and violent harassment by PHC's security forces. An ongoing mediation process is on the verge of collapse as a result of non-cooperation from the company.

Oakland, CA – Kuramo Capital Management (KCM) is at the center of an explosive legal battle for control of the conflict plagued PHC oil palm plantations in the DRC. In a [Mauritius Supreme Court filing](#) obtained by the Oakland Institute, Walé Adeosun – Founder and Chief Investment Officer of KCM – is accused of being “embroiled in a vast international money laundering scheme.” The lawsuit was brought by Kalaa Mpinga, one of PHC's former directors and current shareholder. It seeks US\$25 million in damages and to remove Adeosun from his role as a director of their consortium that owns 76 percent of the company.

Controlling over 100,000 hectares of land in DRC in Lokutu, Yaligimba, and Boteka, PHC is the self-proclaimed largest industrial producer of palm oil in the country. Local communities where the company operates, however, have been engaged in a century long struggle to reclaim their [land seized in 1911 by the Belgian colonial authorities](#) to establish oil palm plantations. They face hunger, poverty, environmental destruction and violent harassment from PHC's security forces today.

“While these communities have been deprived of their lands and face horrific human rights abuses, the continued infighting amongst PHC's shareholders reveals they have fully turned on each other for the right to squeeze the company dry,” said Frédéric Mousseau, Oakland Institute's Policy Director.

The lawsuit is the latest in a string of legal action pitting executives against each other for control of the plantations. Kalaa Mpinga accuses Adeosun of “cross border corporate fraud” designed to defraud PHC and its shareholders for the benefit of a selected few individuals. The lawsuit details how Adeosun allegedly acted as the sole proxy for their consortium while sidelining Mpinga. His alleged abuse of power included the November 2022 appointment of Dr. Mpoko Bokanga as PHC's Chief Operating Officer. In 2021, Dr. Bokanga [co-founded](#) Growth Alliance Partners (GAP), a marketing consultancy firm. Shortly after Dr. Bokanga's appointment, GAP allegedly received over US\$5.1 million from PHC in “performance bonuses” for services it provided between April and October 2022.

“The alleged payment of over US\$5 million in bonuses to a consultancy firm with close ties to Dr. Bokanga is a slap in the face to the communities who continue to live in poverty as a result of being dispossessed by the company. It also raises serious questions for investors regarding the dubious financial management of PHC,” said Jean-François Mombia Atuku of the Réseau d'information et d'appui aux ONG (RIO-RDC).

As detailed in two Oakland Institute [reports](#), the high-profile investors who have bankrolled the plantations through their investments in KCM include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Trust, the University of Michigan, the University of Washington in St. Louis, Northwestern University, the South African Government Employees Pension Fund and Public Investment Corporation, and the Kamehameha Schools. Despite being aware of the human rights abuses and sustained land struggle at the plantations for years, these investors have so far remained invested in KCM funds.

The Mauritius case is not the first fight over PHC to occur. In 2021, KCM [took legal action](#) against Larry Seruma of Nile Capital Management – one of the firm's partners – in Delaware and Canada. The pending case against Seruma in Delaware seeks to remove him from management and significant financial damages. Seruma responded with his own lawsuit seeking legal authority over the plantations and over US\$158 million in damages. His lawsuit claims “Adeosun wants the upside potential of PHC for himself and wants to get me out of the picture. He wants more money.” The decision in the Delaware case is expected imminently and could prove disastrous for one of the parties.

Amidst the ongoing legal battles, communities have filed a complaint in 2018 to the International Complaint Mechanism of the German, French and Dutch development banks – previously invested in PHC. The six-year mediation process has focused on land conflicts, violence against villagers, and the lack of transparency – all of which have only intensified over the period. Communities dispute the legality of PHC's land claims and insist that a handful of social projects or compensation will not address these rights violations. They have been clear that the [mediation will be a failure](#) if their land is not returned.

In disregard for the ongoing suffering in the communities, PHC recently celebrated its production of over 80,000 tons of palm oil at a [lavish gala](#) held in a five-star hotel. In November 2023, blatantly ignoring local communities' demand for their land back, the company [announced](#) massive expansion plans to increase its palm oil production to two million tons annually within a decade.

“Expanding at this scale reveals the company has no plans to return the stolen land, for which it cannot even provide documentation. While the prominent investors bankrolling the plantations have so far ignored the land theft and rights abuses, the serious allegations of money laundering and fraud should finally get their attention,” concluded Mousseau.

###

Additional Languages

[Procès en série pour les actionnaires des plantations de palmiers à huile de PHC en RDC](#)