



## MAR 17 ATAMA PLANTATIONS SARL WILL CREATE LARGEST OIL PALM PLANTATION IN CONGO BASIN

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Half a million hectares of industrial oil palm expansion projects are getting underway in the Congo Basin rainforest, which will result in a fivefold increase in the area of active large-scale palm plantations in the region, according to Seeds of Destruction, a new report issued

today by The Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK).

Approximately two-thirds of the total forest area of the Congo Basin's forests - 115 million hectares - is believed to have suitable soil and climate for growing oil palms. Around 1.6 million hectares of new oil palm developments have been announced since 2009, and palm oil companies are actively searching for larger areas.

Amongst other examples, Seeds of Destruction details the case of Atama Plantations SARL, which will create the largest oil palm plantation in the Congo Basin at 180,000 hectares and catapult its owners, a Malaysian 'pipe-coating specialist' firm, into the top ten global palm oil producers. Evidence suggests that the area designated for clearance mostly appears to be virgin rainforest that is a habitat for numerous endangered species including chimpanzees, gorillas and forest elephants.

RFUK's research has uncovered no evidence of social and environmental assessments for the Atama development, and following our request for information, the owners did not provide us with any evidence to suggest that the free, prior, informed consent of the local people had been obtained. Large-scale clearance of the forest has already started.

The identity of some of Atama's owners is shielded through a web of 'shell' companies registered in secretive tax havens. Some of these companies have been used in the past to mask illicit activity.

Singaporean agricultural global commodities trading giant Olam plans to develop 130,000 hectares of palm oil in Gabon, with the potential for significant environmental impacts, and uncertain social consequences, especially for traditional forest communities. According to McKinsey, the plantation will increase the area of commercial agriculture by 85% in Gabon by 2022, a major threat to the lives of the thousands of indigenous people living in the region.

Simon Counsell, Executive Director of the Rainforest Foundation UK, said: "Governments of Congo Basin countries have handed out vast tracts of rainforest for the development of palm oil with apparently little or no attention to the likely impacts on the environment or on people dependent on the forest. There is a need for regional agreement to ensure that best practices are mandatory for any new oil palm development, including avoiding high conservation value forests and ensuring the rights of existing forest dwellers are respected".

Samuel Nguiffo, Director of the Center for Environment and Development (CED), Cameroon, commented: "New large-scale oil palm developments are a major threat for communities, livelihoods and biodiversity in the Congo Basin. It is absolutely not the appropriate answer to the food security and job creation challenges the countries are facing. Supporting small-scale family agriculture is a better solution".

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For the full report or exec summary please visit [www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/palmoilreport](http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/palmoilreport). Maps, individual case studies and the responses of companies featured, graphics and tables are also available for download here. <http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/palmoilreport>

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