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## Congo Foret responds to the threat of tax terrorism in Kwilu Province, DRC

By Interministeriel order of the Central Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 19 June 2014, Tax on Agricultural Products was one of 38 taxes that was declared illegal. In a country with one of the most crippling taxation in the world, this was a celebration for Agricultural producers and transporters. However, the Provincial Governments were outraged as this is their most lucrative revenue stream.

It is astonishing to conceive that the Provincial Governments cannot generate revenue from the vast swaths of fertile land that lies vacant. This was the vision of the Central Government with its decentralisation programme - take ownership and develop the economy for the thousands and thousands of jobless people.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo remains one of the last unexploited agricultural gems left in the world and yet small agricultural businesses that have established themselves in recent years have no chance of survival.

Congo-Foret has been operating in the Kwilu Province (ex Bandundu) for the past seven years. With British investors on board the business is run with precision and integrity. This small business exploits their rubber plantations across four provinces and transforms the product in a newly established factory in the Kwilu Province. They have fought tooth and nail against a multitude of illegal tax attacks. They have sought the help of Central Government officials who are receptive but to date can offer no more than a sympathetic ear.

Their well travelled story on this issue has passed through as many government offices and embassies as are available in pursuit of

justice and fair economic conditions.

They have faced interrogation and abuse from authorities in the Province for non compliance, they have had their boat crew arrested on a number of occasions and so far have survived relentless threats.

Unfortunately, their fight is far from over. It has been reported that in the past few days, the new Governing body of the Province of Bandundu have just released yet another 23 page list of Provincial taxes. One full page is dedicated to tax on agricultural products. It lists every conceivable agricultural product you can imagine.

The impact for agriculture in the country is devastating. Nevermind that the margin in commercial agriculture is slim in the best conditions, what about the local villagers trapped with their small surplus loaded on their bicycle en route to market?

Congo-Foret declare that they will continue to support the Central Governments efforts on tax reform, however, without the support in return, their future is under threat.

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