

Major Breakthrough in Mediation Between Hoang Anh Gia Lai Company and Fourteen Indigenous Villages

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A major breakthrough was reached in the mediation between fourteen Cambodian indigenous communities and the Vietnamese rubber firm Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL), during meetings held this week in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

On 15-19 September 2015, community representatives of fourteen indigenous villages affected by HAGL's land concessions in Ratanakiri province, company representatives of HAGL and its subsidiaries, and the communities' advisors, including Inclusive Development International, met in Siem Reap. The meeting was facilitated by the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) of the International Finance Corporation.

During the meetings, HAGL representatives officially confirmed the company's commitment not to carry out any further clearance or development of its Heng Brothers, CRD and Hoang Anh Oyadav concessions and return the remaining undeveloped land and forests, which the company estimates to be greater than 10,000 hectares. The commitments were made in two letters dated September 07, 2015 and signed by the HAGL's CEO. In the first letter, HAGL agreed not to clear and develop lands belonging to Kachout, Ket and Nay villages, which were previously at risk of losing their land to the expansion of the company's rubber plantations. Similar commitments were made in the second letter to eleven already affected villages ((Kres, Kam, Mass, Talao, Inn, Malik, Kanat Thom, Kak, Tanong, Muy, and Peng) to avoid causing additional adverse impacts.

During the meetings in Siem Reap, further significant agreements were reached with the eleven villages that have already lost land and resources to the HAGL plantations, including:

- HAGL agreed to only use chemical products that comply with environmental regulations;
- HAGL agreed to repair and maintain any roads and bridges that villagers use which have been affected by HAGL's operations;
- The parties agreed to conduct a joint visit, along with other stakeholders, including NGO advisors, CAO and local authorities, to each of the eleven affected villages in order to identify the boundaries of HAGL's plantations and the boundaries of the affected villages for the purposes of demarcation;
- If through the joint visits it is ascertained that HAGL has cleared and developed customary lands and resources of the communities, then the company committed to (a) offer compensation for this land; and (b) if the villagers do not accept the compensation, return the land to the community; and
- HAGL agreed to support the villagers in securing title to their land.

In addition, HAGL agreed to restore affected water sources, including depleted fish resources, for all fourteen villages. HAGL also agreed to adopt an operational grievance mechanism in relation to their agribusiness operations in Cambodia.

Finally, in recognition of the impacts caused by the company's operations, HAGL officials apologized to representatives of the fourteen villages and offered one cow (400 kg in weight) and 500 USD to each of the villages as an offering for their spirits.

More information about this case, including HAGL's letters of commitment and joint statements regarding the framework agreement reached in Siem Reap, is available here:

<http://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/cambodia-and-laos-hagl-rubber-plantations/>