## The 'Blood Timber' firm getting involved in palm oil in Central African Republic

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In March 2018 Earthsight, the investigative non-profit behind Illegal Deforestation Monitor, released The Coming Storm (https://fe8a03e2-1131-44e7-a06a-fb468c2a30d4.filesusr.com/ugd/624187\_3b22354dff0843789fc440cb4674caaf.pdf), a report exposing the secrecy and collusion in industrial agriculture which are threatening the Congo Basin's forests. In an extract from the report, this post exposes the controversial logging company behind the largest new plantation development in CAR.

While elsewhere in the region companies with licenses to clear forests for industrial agriculture are struggling to fund their up-front development costs, in Central African Republic (CAR), one notorious logging company is getting involved in the plantation business and is having little trouble attracting finance.

The country's first large-scale plantation development is underway in the south of the country, covering some 26,000 hectares. The Palme d'Or oil palm project is owned by the Lebanese El Sahely brothers, who are the country's biggest private sector employers. [1] Their principal asset is SEFCA, CAR's largest logging company. SEFCA, which is responsible for more than half of all the country's tropical timber production and exports, has been accused in the past of illegal logging. It also stands accused of helping fund armed conflict. An investigation by the NGO Global Witness revealed that in 2013 the company paid hundreds of thousands of euros to the Seleka Islamic terrorist group, which briefly overran the country's capital city of Bangui that year. In October 2013, a multinational peace-keeping mission found Seleka soldiers and munitions at SEFCA's Bangui headquarters. [2]

Despite the shady reputation of its owners, African regional banks seem confident, and have committed nearly US\$15 million to fund the development to-date.[3] Satellite images show around 2000 hectares had been developed by the end of 2017. To date the company has cleared only savannah-woodland areas and avoided the densest pockets of forest within its concession.

Image on homepage shows cover of Global Witness' Blood Timber (https://www.globalwitness.org/en-gb/campaigns/forests/bloodtimber/) report.

[1] Xinhua News / Centrafrique Presse Info, 'La Centrafrique relance sa production d'huile de palme', 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017, http://www.centrafrique-presse.info/site/info-economie-10638.html (http://www.centrafrique-presse.info/site/info-economie-10638.html)

[2] Global Witness, Blood Timber: How Europe Helped Fund War in the Central African Republic, July 2015, https://www.globalwitness.org/documents/18026/BLOOD TIMBER web.pdf

[3] Xinhua News / Centrafrique Presse Info, 'La Centrafrique relance sa production d'huile de palme', 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017, http://www.centrafrique-presse.info/site/info-economie-10638.html (http://www.centrafrique-presse.info/site/info-economie-10638.html)

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