

PRESS RELEASE

An environmentalist heavily sentenced in Cameroon!!!

Mr. Nasako Besingi, Director of the NGO Struggle to Economize our Future Environment (SEFE) was sentenced today by a court in Mundemba in the South West region of Cameroon. Nasako Besingi was sued for defamation by the SGSOC Company and two of his former employees. After several adjournments in recent months, judgment was finally passed on 3 November 2015, and the sentence is heavy for this activist: **a fine of 1 million CFA Francs or 3 years imprisonment. He must also pay damages of 10 million CFA Francs to the two civil parties and costs of about 200,000 CFA Francs. Nasako has 24 hours to pay the amount of the fine, otherwise he will be imprisoned for 3 years.**

Reached by telephone, Barrister Adolf Malle, lawyer in Kumba, said he was surprised by the conviction of his client and said he would appeal the decision based on most questionable evidence.

In 2012, while serving as guide to a team of television journalists making a documentary about the conflicts between Herakles Farms Company (SGSOC) and communities of the Mundemba sub-division in the Southwest of Cameroon, Nasako Besingi was violently attacked by a group of people, in the presence of many witnesses. He then wrote a report of the assault, which is now used as defamation.

Mr. Nasako Besingi has been sued and arrested several times since the installation of the Herakles Farms Company (SGSOC) in the Southwest region, because of his denunciation of violations of the Law by this company, which started operations (clearing, road opening and creation of nurseries) before obtaining a legal land title, which constitutes a violation of Cameroonian land Law. The opposition of communities, challenging the legality of the presence of the company on their land and who in their vast majority, condemned this attempt to grab their land, led to numerous conflicts with the company. The conviction of Mr. Nasako Besingi, which follows a series of other procedures, suggests a desire to intimidate environmental activists, in a context marked by the proliferation of investments in land and natural resources, which strongly encroach on village land.

For Samuel Nguiffo, Secretary General of the Centre for Environment and Development, *“The massive influx of investors in the exploitation of land and natural resources can lead to more conflicts of this nature, and it is important that the administration and justice in our country be prepared to manage these tensions. Failure to comply with the law when installing SGSOC Company in the Southwest has been the source of many problems, and the Government must learn from this experience”.*

The Centre for Environment and Development (CED) and its partners regret this sentence, which sends a worrying signal to communities defending their lands and resources faced with activities of multinational companies.

“This case shows us the importance of natural resources management policies which should include better protection of Human Rights and consider customary rights of communities”, said Apollin Koagne, Coordinator of the project “Greening the respect Human Rights in the Congo Basin” I.

While affirming its confidence in the justice of Cameroon, CED and its partners wish that Mr. Nasako Besingui should be granted an appeal for his right to a fair trial.

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The project "Greening the respect Human Rights in the Congo Basin" aims at protecting Human Rights in four countries (Cameroon, Congo, Gabon and Central African Republic). It is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Centre for Environment and Development (CED), the Congolese Observatory of Human Rights (OCDH), Brainforest (Gabon) and the House of Pygmy Women and Children (MEFP).