

## FAR EAST: Vietnam rubber giant to hear complaints from displaced communities

The state-owned Vietnam Rubber Group (VRG) has promised to improve communication with communities affected by its plantations in Cambodia and Laos following requests from Global Witness, a British NGO that investigates the financial dimensions of corruption and resource extraction.

Communities affected by VRG's plantations can now lodge formal complaints or inquiries with the firm. Previously there was no system that allowed people to interact with the company in this way, according to Global Witness.

In a release issued on 20 August, Megan MacInnes of Global Witness said the NGO strongly welcomes moves by VRG to improve communications, but noted that more must be done.

"These steps fall short of addressing all of the problems with the company's plantations, but if properly implemented they could represent an unprecedented move by a rubber company towards delivering justice for citizens whose land and livelihoods have been taken from them," she said.

Le Minh Chau, deputy general director of VRG, told news website Dat Viet that the group has taken steps to reform its business in Laos and Cambodia, but said this effort did not represent an admission that all of Global Witness' claims about VRG are true.

Global Witness' 2013 Rubber Barons report claimed VRG and another of Vietnam's biggest rubber companies, Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL), struck deals with the Lao and Cambodian governments for huge tracts of land without compensating or seeking permission from the people who lived on them.

VRG is a significant player in the region. According to company data, its land concessions in Cambodia cover nearly 150,000 hectares – an area almost as large as London or Manila. In Laos the company presides over almost 19,000 hectares.

Following Global Witness' release of its Rubber Barons report, VRG and its subsidiaries launched a community consultation pilot program, which compensated displaced individuals for farmland or trees claimed by VRG plantations.

VRG says it's now enacting the pilot program at all 21 of its plantations in Cambodia and Laos.

The company says it is committed to directly resolving all issues raised in citizen complaints and inquiries within 30 days of receiving them, according to Global Witness.

Individuals, communities or the groups representing them can submit claims either in person or via post to VRG's local branch offices or company headquarters in Phnom Penh and Vientiane.

Global Witness said it would be working with local organisations to monitor and evaluate this system over the next two years.

Source: Daily "Thanhnien News", HCM City; 25 Aug 2014  
(Syed Rashid Ali, Karachi, Pakistan)

### Adresse:

<http://www.gupta-verlag.com/general/news/industry/14864/far-east-vietnam-rubber-giant-to-hear-complaints-from-displaced-commu>