



Creemos en la vida antes de la muerte

Christian Aid calls for full devolution of the land in the “Las Pavas” case, along with reparation for damages suffered by the community.

July 30, 2010

Christian Aid (UK and Ireland)¹ has been supporting the farmer families of Las Pavas², South Bolívar (Colombia), in their struggle for land and food security since their eviction from their land on 14 July 2009. The business consortium “El Labrador” responsible for this eviction includes CI Tequendama, a subsidiary company of Daabon Group, one of the country’s main palm oil producers and a supplier to The Body Shop³.

In September 2009, The Body Shop contacted Christian Aid with a view to clarifying the facts of the case and bringing the dispute to a satisfactory conclusion. As a result of these discussions we jointly commissioned a team of experts to conduct an independent review of the dispute. Today sees the publication of this report. It fully upholds Christian Aid’s analysis that:

- The 123 farmer families of ASOCAB have for decades been depending on the land in question for their survival and development, despite assertions to the contrary by Daabon;
- The El Labrador Consortium had no excuse not to have known about this, although the confusing role played by Colombian government institutions did not help to provide clarity;
- The Colombian State has not guaranteed the rights of the farmers families of Las Pavas;
- The families are entirely peaceful, despite assertions to the contrary by Daabon;
- There has been clear environmental damage at a local level, despite denials by Daabon, and there could also be serious damage at a sub-regional level caused by the accumulated impact of palm growing in the region;
- The complex situation has deep social causes generated by the failure of the state to fulfill its constitutional mandate. Asymmetry of power between the actors has aggravated the problem, as has the internal armed conflict and an unbalanced militaristic response to it.

With these facts now squarely on the table, reasonable observers will conclude that the livelihoods of hundreds of people and the life-chances of their children have been significantly prejudiced by the actions of the palm company. They are also likely to agree that the most appropriate and ethical response to this tragedy is that the families have their land formally returned to them as soon as possible, so as to end their reliance on food aid, and to rebuild their shattered lives. One way of doing

¹ Christian Aid is an international development agency working in 50 countries. It works with the poorest and most marginalized communities, of all faiths and none. In Colombia it works with communities that have been victims or are at risk of violence, displacement, human rights abuses, or economic injustice. It works through local organizations, supporting their work, and adding value where it can.

² Associated in the association ASOCAB (Asociación de Campesinos del Corregimiento de Buenos Aires).

³ The Body Shop International operates across more than 2,500 stores in over 60 markets worldwide



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this would be to grant access to the land immediately, with a view to dealing with the more complex areas of ownership and state support for a fragile economy over time.

The Body Shop has demonstrated a high degree of responsibility and good will, seeking to clarify the facts before deciding how to act, and insisting on an ethical outcome. It now has the clear facts at its disposal. It is incumbent on The Body Shop to act in accordance with its high ethical principles. If The Body Shop cannot persuade its supplier company to ensure reparation for the damages and respect for the rights of the farmer families whose lives have been devastated, it should stop sourcing from this supplier.

The ball is now firmly in Daabon's court. In the same way as Christian Aid has strongly criticized Daabon for its actions to date, we would be just as ready to praise it if it starts to live up to the international expectations of an ethical supplier.

"The Body Shop is a world leader in supply chain ethics. We have been impressed by the seriousness and good faith of the team we have been working with – they are doing their best to do what is right. Now that they have the facts clearly in front of them, they now need to use their power to ensure justice is done for these families. As The Body Shop's founder, Anita Roddick, said, "Business has to be a force for social change. It is not enough to avoid hideous evil – it must, we must, actively do good." At Christian Aid we agree with this bold vision and urge The Body Shop to put pressure on its supplier to live up to these principles." Cathy Bouley, Christian Aid Colombia Programme Officer.

This professional and independent report should lead to a wider debate on the Colombian Government policy of expanding and subsidizing the palm oil industry. The Las Pavas case is not an isolated case and palm plantations continue to expand and fuel violence, poverty and environmental degradation in Colombia.

Christian Aid will continue to support the members of ASOCAB in their claim for land devolution, a secure livelihood, and reparation for the suffering they have undergone.

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