

**PRIVATIZING THE CDC WITHOUT THE CONSENT AND PARTICIPATION
OF NATIVE LANDOWNERS CARRIES GRAVE RISKS ESPECIALLY TO
POTENTIAL INVESTORS**

Mr. Horst Köhler
Managing Director
International Monetary Fund
700 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20431

June 16, 2000

Dear Mr. Managing Director:

Subject: **IMF SANCTIONED PRIVATIZATION OF CAMEROON
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (CDC), WITHOUT CONSULTATION WITH
THE NATIVE LANDOWNERS.**

We, the Bureau of the Bakweri Land Claims Committee-USA (BLCC-USA), together with our fellow Fako indigenes living in all continents of the world, assembled through the revolutionary technology of the Internet, have been made to understand that in June 2000, the IMF Board of Directors reviewed the *Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF)/ Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)* program of the Republic of Cameroon, and that the Managing Director, Mr. Horst Koehler, will be visiting Cameroon in July 2000. The country's privatization scheme is being carried out under this program. Cameroon government-controlled parastatal companies scheduled to be privatized under the ESAF/PRGF program include the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), an agro-industrial company located mainly in Fako Division, home of the indigenous Bakweri people.

The Bakweri, speaking through the Bakweri Land Claims Committee in the U.S.A. (BLCC-USA) hereby reiterate their unwavering opposition to any privatization program that does not take into consideration the legitimate rights of the natives whose ancestral lands the soon to be privatized CDC and its colonial predecessors, have exploited without compensation for more than a century.

We wish to state that more than 380 square miles of land currently occupied by the CDC, virtually all of Fako division's most fertile land, were forcefully and brutally expropriated from our forefathers without compensation, by German colonizers in the late 19th century for purposes of large-scale plantation agriculture. In 1947, these plantations were leased to the CDC by the British colonial government which had seized them from the Germans after World War II, on terms that they would be held in trust for the indigenous native Bakweri until such time that they were able to manage the plantations themselves. In 1960 the British colonial administration ceded power to the Government of Southern Cameroons, which has now been succeeded by the Government of the Republic of Cameroon.

Under the terms of the lease of these lands to CDC, the latter was required to pay annual ground rent, for the benefit of the disposed indigenous natives. The native Bakweri have never been paid any part of these rents, and with privatization looming in the horizon, whereby their lands will be alienated to foreign companies, the Bakweri resolutely refuse to recognize any privatization of the CDC that does not take into account the just, long-standing and legitimate rights of the Bakweri over their land. (Please see United Nations Trusteeship Agreements of 1946 and 1947, and the 1960 Land Lease Agreement at the BLCC-USA website:

<http://www.bakwerilands.org>

The position of the Bakweri, the land owners, is that while they are not opposed to privatization *per se*, the rental terms under which their land is leased to foreign developers should be clearly spelt out and acceptable to them, with a clear statement of the reversionary Bakweri interest in the land.

It must also be pointed out that since this region is the habitat of many endangered wildlife species including mountain gorillas, antelopes and elephants, prospective lessees of lands currently occupied by the CDC should also be made aware of their obligations within the framework of internationally recognized environmental norms. The terms of privatization should be clearly spelt out and should recognize the ownership of land as a

distinct variable which, together with capital and labor, makes plantation agriculture possible.

The BLCC position is consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 21 of the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981 which states, *inter alia*:

"1. All peoples shall freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources. This right shall be exercised in the exclusive interest of the people. In no case shall a people be deprived of it.

2. In case of spoliation, the dispossessed people shall have the right to the lawful recovery of its property as well as to an adequate compensation."

As the current impasse in Zimbabwe and Kenya demonstrate, land expropriated from African natives by European colonialists a century ago is the source of much contemporary unrest and instability. All Cameroonians of goodwill bear witness that the Bakweri people have over the years opted for a peaceful resolution of this CDC Bakweri land problem. However should the privatization of the CDC go ahead without the input of the Bakweri on whose land most of the corporation's agro-industrial activities are located, we reserve the right to seek legal redress against the Government of the Republic of Cameroon, the IMF, the World Bank as well as all lessees who derive title to the land by whatever means, in any country of the world where such bodies are located.

In furtherance of the above stated objective, the BLCC-USA will associate with the international mass media, environmental groups, Human Right groups and other non-governmental organizations around the world, in its just struggle against exploitation of ancestral lands without compensation to the dispossessed landowners.

It is worthy of note to all concerned with the privatization of the CDC that there is right now very high socio-political tension in the English-speaking provinces of Cameroon, where the lands under discussion are to be found. Privatizing the CDC without the consent and participation of the native landowners carries grave risks especially to potential investors, as the object lesson in Zimbabwe and Kenya amply illustrates. The

world must learn to prevent conflicts, as the cost of putting them out is usually disproportionately high, in terms of human lives and resources.

BLCC-USA sincerely hopes that its timely appeals will be headed to, in the interest of equity, peace, and national unity of present and future generations of Cameroonians.

Please accept the expression of our highest esteem.

For and on behalf of BLCC-USA and the Bakweri around the world.

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