



To:
Han De Groot
Chief Executive Officer
Rainforest Alliance

cc:
Nigel Sizer
Chief Programme Officer
Rainforest Alliance

5 March 2018

Dear Mr De Groot,

ENSURING TRADE UNION RIGHTS ON RAINFOREST ALLIANCE CERTIFIED PLANTATIONS

We are writing to express our concern at the lack of freedom for plantation workers to join independent trade unions on some Rainforest Alliance (RA) certified plantations in Costa Rica and Ecuador and our plans to campaign publicly to address this.

Despite the Alliance's certification standard requiring that "Workers must have the right to freely organize and voluntarily negotiate their working conditions in a collective manner, we have evidence that workers on a number of RA certified plantations continue to be denied their fundamental right to freely join an independent trade union.

The recent Banana Link report [Rainforest Alliance and the Discount Supermarkets: Low Prices and Easy Standards?](#) questioned the respect for trade union rights on RA certified plantations, while the report by Oxfam Germany, [Sweet Fruit, Bitter Truth](#), provided evidence of workers on certified plantations being denied their trade union rights.

We have welcomed the willingness of the RA to engage in dialogue with both Banana Link and Oxfam Germany to discuss the issues raised by these reports, and to enter into dialogue with trade unions representing plantation workers in Latin America.

However, we continue to receive reports of violations of trade union rights and discrimination against trade union members on certified plantations, [such as Anexco in Costa Rica](#), while our trade union partners [COLSIBA](#) (the Coordinating Body of Latin American Banana and Agro-industrial Unions) and SINTRAPEM – COSIBACR have lost faith that RA is acting seriously.

Moreover, the recent temporary suspension of the certification of Grupo Acón in Costa Rica, followed by the subsequent plantation-by-plantation re-certification of most of the company, has not inspired the confidence of the trade union [SITRAP](#) that the necessary changes have been made to ensure that workers are freely able to join an independent trade union.

Additionally, at Reybanpac in Ecuador, a "yellow" union was installed by the company to which nearly all the 5,000 workers have to pay 1% of the salary, although the "union" has only 70 members. Most workers say, they don't know the union leaders or what happens to the 1% of their salaries. And when Oxfam Germany surveyed workers there for their report, they found that 97% of them believed the company would not allow the formation of an independent trade union.

We believe that it is only workers themselves, and their on-the-ground representatives, who are best placed to substantiate whether trade union rights are being respected or not on certified plantations. While welcome, your new requirement for auditors to meet unions before auditing any plantation can only be effective if these auditors are properly trained. This would include them possessing a comprehensive understanding of the role of independent unions, and in being able to recognise how anti-union harassment manifests itself in workplaces.

We plan to launch a public campaign asking that RA take concrete action to address our ongoing concerns, by:

1. complying with the requirement of your current (and any future) standards, guaranteeing the freedom of plantation workers to join a trade union, including by ensuring that an independent trade union is either organising or has been invited to educate workers about their rights, **prior** to certification, or in the case of already certified plantations, ahead of the inspection and renewal process at the end of their current period of certification; and
2. consulting with COLSIBA in reviewing your certification standards following the recent merger with UTZ, along with any changes to your inspection, monitoring and evaluation procedures that result from the merger.

We hope that RA will respond by adopting these necessary measures to ensure workers on certified plantations are free to exercise their right to join an independent trade union.

Yours sincerely

Birthe Pedersen
President
ActionAid France

Kenneth Rasmussen
Policy Officer
Aktive Forbrugere

Helge Fischer
Project Coordinator
BanaFair

Jacqui Mackay
National Coordinator
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Iris Munguia
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COLSIBA

Ramón Barrantes
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Živa Kavka Gobbo
President
**Focus, association for
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Bert Schouwenburg
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Judy Gearhart
Executive Director
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Adwoa Sakyi
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IUF Africa

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