



PRESS RELEASE: Statement of the Czech Palm Oil Watch on recent press releases in which some IUCN members call to end the boycott of palm oil on behalf of their organization

Boycotting palm oil is the right way: oil palm causes more damage than other oil crops

Prague, December 16, 2018 - This year, two press releases appeared in media around the world, in which IUCN (The International Union for Conservation of Nature) representatives called for an end to the palm oil boycott. According to them, the palm oil boycott would necessarily increase the area needed to grow other oil crops with lower yields. They refer to a detailed IUCN document (*Oil Palm and Biodiversity, A situation Analysis by the IUCN Oil Palm Task Force* [see Annex]) issued this year, which does not, in fact, call for the end to the palm oil boycott. In our opinion, this is a misuse of the IUCN reputation to manipulate world public opinion in favour of palm oil. It gives the impression that the official IUCN statement shared by a significant majority of its members is to reject the palm oil boycott.

Stanislav Lhota, expert guarantor of the Czech POWI and a member of the IUCN Primate Specialist Group, who participated in the review of the IUCN document in December 2017, comments as follows: "When we discussed its contents, there was a proposal to condemn the palm oil boycott. A very heated debate ensued, because it was a proposal based on corporate lobbying and not on scientific evidence and involved arguments that were biased, misleading, perhaps to the point of lying. After this discussion, the proposal was deleted from the document, leaving only an objective and impartial analysis of the issue. The biggest concern for me was that the call to end the palm oil boycott came from the team leader, Erik Meijaard, in the first press release that accompanied the IUCN document, and a few months later in another press release, this time by IUCN's general director. Although I respect both colleagues, I consider their actions unethical. Promoting personal views and interests in the name of the world's largest nature conservation organization is, in my opinion, inadmissible. The propagation of palm oil could have undesirable negative consequences. Today, these statements are widely accepted and disseminated by the world's media without any reading of the entire document to find that there is no such recommendation in it."

Apart from the arguments against the boycott, there are many strong arguments which support continuing the palm oil boycott, i.e. the reduction of unnecessary consumption and the prevention of increases in demand:

- (1) First of all, the palm oil boycott does not necessarily mean there has to be a substitution by other vegetable oils. Such reasoning is based on the misunderstanding of the most basic principles of ecologically responsible behaviour. Not buying a palm oil product does not automatically mean buying something else instead. The most of palm oil-containing foods fall into the class of unhealthy and unnecessary foods (junk food, empty calories, i. e. foods with high energy but low nutritional value that can be easily avoided without substitution). Less palm oil could help implement national strategies for healthier diets. Similarly, a number of cosmetic products are disposable, and there are many more examples. We do not need palm oil even in agrofuels because it is a solution that is not ecological, economical nor technologically adequate. First-generation agrofuels are an outdated dead end.
- (2) We admit that in several cases the boycott will mean replacing palm oil with other oils. However, its relative "harmfulness" cannot be assessed simply by comparing hectare yields. It is absolutely impossible to compare a hectare of tropical rainforest to that of tropical dry forest or farmland in the



temperate zone for the cultivation of other oils. The rainforests cover only 7% of the total area of the planet's surface, yet they are extremely rich in biodiversity with a large proportion of terrestrial animal and plant species, including a number of endemic species. They also play an incomparably more important role in maintaining a healthy global environment and preserving thousands of potential medicines against various serious illnesses. Claiming that the destruction of one hectare of tropical rainforest is comparable to using one hectare of our farmland for oil crops would be the same as if we were to assert that if the meteorite hit our house, we would suffer the same damage as if it had hit our garden.

- (3) Reasoning that if we stop buying palm oil, its production will be replaced by soybean production, is misguided. Soybean production in tropical America really does represent a huge environmental problem. However, this soy is used for livestock feed production, and thus is supported by meat, egg and dairy consumption. However, many years of food ingredient monitoring in the Czech Republic clearly show that the ongoing deviation from palm oil does not mean soybean production support. Palm oil is replaced in most cases by rapeseed or sunflower oil and in some cases by coconut oil and shea butter - but not soy oil.
- (4) Soil fertility should also be considered. Although the existing plantations will produce palm oil for several years, the huge yield of palm oil on poor tropical soils will require high costs in the future. In Kalimantan, intense palm oil production causes very rapid soil degradation (e. g. acidification due to the use of urea and other fertilizers and due to erosion), loss of groundwater, and river pollution. Some of the thirty-year old plantations in southern and eastern Kalimantan are now becoming an unproductive wasteland. The yield of oil palms is therefore not higher than for other oil crops, it is only "faster" and will also fall faster. Whereas, for instance in the temperate zone of Europe and North America, the fields for oil production can be used - with adequate care - for thousands of years. If production were to stay so high, poor tropical soils, peaty soils and sandy soils can be used only for decades.
- (5) As an alternative to the palm oil boycott, certification based on the principles and criteria of the RSPO (Roundtable for the Production of Sustainable Palm Oil) is offered. However, the fact that RSPO certification alone is a highly controversial solution to which there is still much distrust is ignored. Analyses show that RSPO-member corporations take care of the environment better than non-members, but not much better. In the area of their concessions, the destruction of rainforests continues to be intensified, and the situation is worsening recently. Rather than addressing the problems themselves, the RSPO has begun to focus more on greenwashing where seemingly no further pressure to improve is needed. Unfortunately, IUCN's most recent press releases have made a significant contribution. Without limiting consumption, RSPO certified oil will not solve the problems of conventional (irresponsible) production of most palm oil because it cannot cover such a huge demand without the need for more land to the detriment of rainforests.

Finally, we add that we do not criticize the report as such, but only its misrepresented outputs in the form of press releases by some IUCN members and the connected interpretations on news portals.

The IUCN study itself does not bring any new or overwhelming findings, notably it highlights the need to continue doing more research and the complexity of the phenomenon on a global scale. IUCN repeatedly states that most palm oil is produced with minimal environmental considerations and biodiversity



conservation. The best solution could be to increase the demand for palm oil, which will be "clean" in terms of its impact on nature. However, as the IUCN notes at the same time, today's certification scheme does not provide consumers with such assurance and the producers should be forced to change their approach. We fully agree with this statement and believe that limiting palm oil consumption is logical and meaningful under these conditions, especially in countries that do not produce palm oil themselves.

More information:

http://palmoilwatch.net/docs/Five_Most_Common_Misjudgements.pdf

http://palmoilwatch.net/docs/Palm_oil_-_a_piece_of_forest_in_our_homes.pdf

Mentioned press release links:

<https://www.iucn.org/news/secretariat/201806/saying-no-palm-oil-would-likely-displace-not-halt-biodiversity-loss---iucn-report>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/26/palm-oil-disastrous-for-wildlife-but-here-to-stay-experts-warn>

IUCN Report:

<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2018-027-En.pdf>

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