



Rhett Butler
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February 12, 2020

Dear Mr. Butler,

Re: Mongabay Article “Palm oil, fire pushing protected areas in Honduras to the ‘point of no return’”

Leonardo Guevara and Lesly Frazier’s article, referenced above and published on your website on December 30, contains unfair and erroneous statements about Corporación Dinant that I respectfully asked to be removed with immediate effect.

As I wrote to you (copy enclosed) on April 16, 2019 in response to a similar article by Max Radwin entitled “‘It’s getting worse’: National parks in Honduras hit hard by palm oil,” but which you did not consider when publishing this latest article, Dinant does not operate any facilities inside any reserve area, and specifically not the Punta Izopo National Park or Jeanette Kawas National Park. The palm oil facilities to which you refer inside the national parks are owned and operated by organizations with whom we have no connection or control. This distinction is crucial, and I ask that you make this clear in your article.

According to Honduran law, manufacturing and agriculture are not permitted within the borders of land designated a National Park or National Protected Area, with the exemption of duly authorized operations, which is not the Dinant’s case. The environmental authorities do authorize operations in Buffer Zones – designated areas surrounding the park or protected areas – where agricultural operations are allowed but are strictly regulated. Dinant operates 857.61 hectares of plantations in the Buffer Zone outside of the Izopo protected area, including 261 hectares at our Ceibita Way Plantation, 516 hectares at our Olingo Plantation, and 80.61 hectares at our Hicaque Plantation. However, those plantations already existed before the Honduran Congress legally declared Punta Izopo a National Park in May 2012. As such, we are permitted to continue operating by complying with all regulations. In fact, we have gone further than required by voluntarily undertaking extensive reforestation and restoration programs.

In addition, Dinant’s plantations in the Buffer Zone – just like all of our plantations – have been awarded (and retained) ISO 14011 for their environmental management systems, and two prestigious International Sustainability and Carbon Certifications – ISCC EU and ISCC Plus – in recognition of the sustainability of their raw materials and products, the traceability of the supply chain, and control of greenhouse gas emissions.

To be clear, Dinant does not have any operations near to Jeanette Kawas National Park. Our Lean Extraction Mill is located approximately 35-40 kms from the Punta Izopo National Park and over 50 kms from the Jeanette Kawas Park. Furthermore, Dinant has a strict policy of not buying fruit from independent producers that may have plantations inside those protected areas.

The misstatements in your article are particularly hurtful because Dinant protects many hundreds of hectares of tropical rainforest and has two Wildlife Conservation Centers in Honduras where we fund and manage the breeding, rearing and release of endangered native species.

Dinant does not have any plantations on land that was previously forest, as the article by Guevara and Frazier erroneously states. In fact, Dinant planted its palm plantations on existing agricultural land that had already been cleared by previous owners for such uses as cattle ranching and bananas. No crucial habitat has ever been destroyed or negatively impacted due to our plantations. Interestingly, as our oil palm plantations have matured, our organic practices and reduced use of artificial fertilizers have allowed flora to flourish, providing animals with better nutrition, shelter and wildlife corridors.

Nor have we ever forced any landowners to sell their property. In the 1990s, Dinant – like many companies and individuals – saw economic opportunities in regenerating peasant farmland left idle or in poor condition, and so legally purchased land from peasant co-operatives who were happy to sell to improve their economic circumstances. There was no coercion by Dinant in the land purchase agreements. In fact, many of these cooperatives approached Dinant’s owner Don Miguel Facusse and other successful Honduran businessmen directly to buy their land.

The article singles out Dinant for criticism and yet, unlike other palm oil producers in the region, we have an excellent environmental record. We rigorously benchmark our palm oil business against stringent international standards on economic, environmental and social impact; the sustainability of our supplies; and our engagement with all local stakeholders. In addition to being awarded ISO 14001, ISCC EU and ISCC Plus, our extraction mills at Aguán and Leán have zero discharge operations, with the wastewater used for ferti-irrigation or the production of organic compost. Our atmospheric emissions controls ensure that all boilers meet required national and international environmental standards.

Finally, nobody at Dinant has a record of being contacted by the authors, as the article claims, and thus we were not afforded an opportunity to respond. The facilities at San Pedro Sula, which were allegedly contacted for comment, consist of a warehouse and a snacks factory, whereas Dinant’s corporate offices are in Tegucigalpa, as anyone visiting our website would understand. Therefore, I respectfully now request that you remove all references to Dinant in Guevara and Frazier’s article. At the very least, I ask that you incorporate my concerns into an updated version of the article or publish my letter alongside the original article.

In the meantime, I repeat my invitation to you and Max Radwin – now extended to Leonardo Guevara and Lesly Frazier – to visit Dinant’s oil plantations in the Aguán and Lean regions, as well as the rest of our operations sites, to witness firsthand the results of the extensive resources that we have invested in community engagement, and environmental and social management.

Yours sincerely,

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