

PRESS RELEASE

AFRICAN PALM OIL INDUSTRY MOVES FOR A SUSTAINABLE BALANCE BETWEEN CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

RSPO & Proforest host the 3rd Sustainable Palm Oil Conference

Accra, GHANA - Tuesday 20 August 2019: Close to 200 delegates came together today for Africa's third Sustainable Palm Oil Conference, hosted by the [Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil](#) (RSPO) and [Proforest](#), to discuss the urgent need for a long-term sustainable development plan for oil palm production in Africa.

As RSPO's presence increases with certified members in over 15 countries across Africa, and with stringent new [Principles and Criteria](#) in place, the conference provided an ideal platform for a constructive debate around regional vision and renewed commitment from key producing countries. With high-profile dignitaries, growers, NGOs, financial institutions and consumer goods manufacturers in attendance, it was mutually acknowledged that if African palm oil producing countries achieve their ambition to convert from net importers to net exporters, palm oil production will *significantly* increase. H.E. Godwin Nogheghase Obaseki, the Governor of Edo State, Nigeria delivered a strong message to delegates and the industry; "If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem. Let me congratulate all of you here today, for demonstrating your commitment to a solution...It is in the interests of all of us in Africa to make sustainable palm oil the norm."

In a region where livelihoods are intricately connected to both the palm oil sector and natural resources, and where oil palm growing areas overlap areas of international conservation importance such as High Forest Cover (HFC) countries like Gabon, it is vitally important that any development is done sustainably, ensuring a balance between palm oil production and nature conservation. RSPO's Assurance Director, Salahudin Yaacob, called for a "long-term sustainable development plan" in the region, stating that "RSPO can only achieve its vision of transforming markets to make sustainable palm oil the norm through collaboration with *all* stakeholders, from growers to governments, and financial institutions to NGOs."

Abraham Baffoe, Africa Regional Director for Proforest, said "a sustainable oil palm industry in Africa is something we are deeply committed to – and it is wonderful to have so much interest from companies and other stakeholders. We look forward to seeing these connections deepen as a result of this conference, as we all work together towards an industry which contributes to the economic development of African countries, whilst preserving the crucially important biodiversity of the region."

With smallholders estimated to account for approximately 70% of palm oil production area in Africa, yet roughly only 30% of output, supporting smallholders to improve their yields was another keen area of focus for delegates. Hon. Robert Fagans, Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Liberia, stated that, "working with smallholders to improve their yields through sustainable

farming methods is critical for palm oil growth in Liberia.” In the last year RSPO has been developing a new, separate standard to simplify the entry process into the certification system. RSPO members are expected to vote to adopt the proposed [RSPO Independent Smallholder Standard](#) during the RSPO General Assembly in November 2019. The RSPO will continue to work with local partners on the ground to ensure that sustainable palm oil production in Africa benefits both people and planet.

The conference covered the regional implementation of the 2018 RSPO Principles and Criteria; the role of financial institutions in promoting sustainable agriculture; how governments can mainstream sustainability; and opportunities to change the deforestation narrative in African palm oil producing countries. The new [Decent Living Wage Guidance](#) was also socialised with members as an important tool to help improve livelihoods. Furthermore, a ministerial address was delivered to delegates by H.E. Godwin Nogheghase Obaseki, the Governor of Edo State, Nigeria, while Abraham Baffoe, Africa Regional Director of Proforest and Bakhtiar Talhah, Chief Operating Officer of RSPO, gave the opening and closing remarks.

About Proforest:

Proforest helps people to manage and source natural resources sustainably. We help the private sector to implement their commitments to responsible sourcing and responsible production in a way which delivers benefits for the people and places where commodities are produced. We work with palm, rubber, cocoa, shea and timber in Africa, as well as soy, beef and other commodities worldwide. Effective collaboration with government is essential – the Africa Palm Oil Initiative is a good example of this, as are our other programmes on landscapes, capacity development etc which demonstrate the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach. Voluntary approaches are also important – hence our work here with RSPO. We are happy to be collaborating with the RSPO Africa Sustainable Palm Oil Conference, and very much look forward to participating in many fruitful discussions over the course of the week.

About RSPO:

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) was formed in 2004 with the objective of promoting the growth and use of sustainable oil palm products through credible global standards and engagement of stakeholders. RSPO is a not-for-profit, international, membership organisation that unites stakeholders from the different sectors of the palm oil industry including oil palm producers, palm oil processors or traders, consumer goods manufacturers, retailers, banks and investors, environmental or nature conservation NGOs, and social or developmental NGOs.

This multi-stakeholder representation is mirrored in the governance structure of RSPO such that seats in the Board of Governors, Steering Committees and Working Groups are fairly allocated to each sector. In this way, RSPO lives out the philosophy of the "roundtable" by giving equal rights to each stakeholder group, facilitating traditionally adversarial stakeholders in working together to reach decisions by consensus, and achieving RSPO's shared vision of making sustainable palm oil the norm.

The seat of the association is in Zurich, Switzerland, while the secretariat is currently based in Kuala Lumpur with satellite offices in Jakarta (ID), London (UK), Zoetermeer (NL), Beijing (CN) and Bogotá (CO).

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RSPO

Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

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