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Côte d'Ivoire: Arbitrary Evictions in Protected Forests

Forestry Agency Implicated in Violence, Extortion

(Dakar) – Residents of Côte d'Ivoire's protected forests live in fear of arbitrary evictions and have suffered extortion and physical abuse by forest conservation authorities, Human Rights Watch and the Ivorian Coalition of Human Rights Actors (Rassemblement des Acteurs Ivoiriens des Droits Humains, RAIDH) said today. The Ivorian government should halt all forced evictions, investigate and prosecute abuses, and introduce legislation that provides farmers with the protections required by international law.

The Forestry Development Agency (Société de Développement des Forêts, SODEFOR), a state agency under the Water and Forests Ministry, regularly evicts farmers without warning, often burning their homes and possessions in the process. Farmers are also frequently beaten and humiliated during eviction operations.

"Families are being violently evicted from the land on which they have lived and worked for years, and are seeing everything they own destroyed in an instant," said [Jim Wormington](#), West Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The lack of oversight of SODEFOR's operations has left these communities vulnerable to abuse."

Côte d'Ivoire's 231 protected forests (*forêts classées*), state land set aside for conservation, have been devastated by deforestation, with more than half of the country's four million hectares of protected forest cut down for farmland. As part of its efforts to combat climate change, announced prior to the December 2015 Paris climate summit, the Ivorian government in September restated its intention to restore protected forests as part of a broader commitment to return at least 20 percent of its territory to forest.

While conserving forests can play an important role in combatting climate change, however, environmental protection measures should respect the human rights of people living in protected forests. International law protects anyone who occupies homes or land from forced evictions that are not preceded by adequate notice or do not respect the dignity and rights of those affected, regardless of whether they occupy the land legally.

In May 2015 and March 2016, Human Rights Watch and RAIDH conducted week-long research missions to the protected forests of Cavally, Goin-Débé and Scio in western Côte d'Ivoire. These forests, in which cocoa farms run by small-

scale farmers have replaced vast tracts of forest, typify the challenge the Ivorian government faces in protecting the environment while respecting the rights of farmers.

Human Rights Watch and RAIDH interviewed more than 85 community leaders, union activists, SODEFOR officials, and farmers, including 25 people whose homes or plantations had been destroyed by SODEFOR during eviction operations spanning 2014 to 2016.

None of the families evicted, many of whom had lived in protected forest for years, had been notified in advance of when the eviction was to occur, as required by international law.

Several people interviewed showed researchers the burned out remains of their homes, with their charred possessions still visible inside. Villagers said that they were not given the opportunity to remove their belongings before their houses were set alight.

"My house was in the first courtyard as you enter the settlement, and as soon as SODEFOR arrived they started burning down the houses," said



Children stand among houses burnt during an eviction operation in the protected forest of Goin-Débé, Côte d'Ivoire, in January 2016.

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Homes, Farms, and Lives Destroyed in Côte d'Ivoire's Forests



Residents of Côte d'Ivoire's protected forests live in fear of arbitrary evictions and have suffered extortion and physical abuse by forest conservation authorities.

one farmer, who said his house was set alight while his newborn baby slept inside. “Fortunately my wife heard the firing and shouting, and she rushed back to the house to save the child. SODEFOR hadn’t checked to see who was in the house before they set it on fire.”

For communities in protected forests, many of whom rely on their land for cash crops and food to support their families, the impact of losing their longtime homes and livelihoods is severe. “Without our land in Goin-Débé, I don’t know what we’re going to do,” one farmer said. “The people you see today have practically nothing to eat... We don’t even have enough food to give us the energy to work.”

Community leaders and aid workers said that SODEFOR failed to ensure that families who have been evicted and are unable to provide for themselves have adequate alternative housing or productive land, as international law requires.

Many community leaders and farmers also said that SODEFOR officers regularly use the threat of eviction to solicit money or other ‘gifts,’ including livestock. “He told me that a commander from a nearby town will be coming,” said a farmer, recounting a recent call with a SODEFOR officer. “So I understood that to mean the reception we give them should be bigger than usual.”

One farmer said that he had paid a SODEFOR agent 75,000 CFA (US\$125) in February 2015 to spare his plantation during an eviction operation. But when SODEFOR returned in December 2015, he was away from his plantation and had been unable to make the payment necessary to protect his crops. “I lost 18 hectares that were either burnt or destroyed,” he said. “I wasn’t there to persuade them otherwise.”

Farmers who fail to give money to SODEFOR agents also risk arrest and prosecution. Côte d’Ivoire’s forestry code criminalizes farming in protected forest without prior approval, and SODEFOR frequently arrests and detains farmers during eviction operations.

Community leaders told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH, however, that whether farmers are prosecuted frequently depends on their ability to pay SODEFOR officials to secure their release. One cocoa buyer said that after he was arrested in Goin-Débé, SODEFOR agents told him, “Give what you can and we will leave you alone.” He gave them 200,000 CFA (US\$334) and was released.

Human Rights Watch and RAIDH also documented several incidents in which eviction operations were accompanied by violence against farmers arrested or detained by SODEFOR. Three farmers said SODEFOR agents, upon arriving in their village in January 2016, forced them and more than a dozen other young men to lie on the ground and then whipped them across their backs and buttocks with sticks, belts and the flat side of machetes.

The farmers were then taken by SODEFOR to a nearby town, where SODEFOR agents told one of the detainees to pretend to shoot a video as other prisoners were beaten. “They made us get into a prayer position, on our knees facing forward,” said one of the farmers, who needed three days of hospital treatment following the abuse. “They told him to hold a wooden block on his shoulder, like he was filming us with a camera – I guess it was a way to humiliate us.”

To prevent future abuses, the Ivorian government should immediately halt forced evictions until it passes legislation giving occupants of protected forest protection from arbitrary evictions, and should find a long-term solution that would both conserve protected forests and protect residents’ rights. SODEFOR officers implicated in physical abuse, extortion, or criminality should be investigated and prosecuted.

“An immediate halt to forced evictions is the only way to prevent further abuses,” said Bamba Sindou, General Coordinator of RAIDH. “Côte d’Ivoire should urgently investigate alleged abuses by SODEFOR and prosecute those agents implicated in criminality.”

Côte d’Ivoire’s Protected Forests

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Côte d’Ivoire’s forests have been decimated by deforestation for agriculture, with one government factsheet [stating](#) that the proportion of the national territory covered by forests declined from about 50 percent in 1900 to less than 12 percent in 2015.

Côte d’Ivoire’s 231 protected forests, established for conservation, have not been spared, with large stretches of forest replaced by plantations growing cocoa and other commodities. The Ivorian government, in policy documents seen by Human Rights Watch, acknowledges that 30 to 40 percent of Côte d’Ivoire’s national cocoa crop – which [makes up](#) 15 to 20 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – comes from land designated as protected forests.

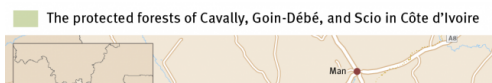
“Given how large these forests are, the extent of the destruction is extreme,” Jean-Baptiste Kouamé, head of SODEFOR’s Forest Management Unit (Unité de Gestion Forestière) for Cavally, told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH. “In Scio



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Bamba Sindou

General Coordinator, Ivorian Coalition of Human Rights Actors (RAIDH)



Section 1 (SODEFOR) for Cavally, the Niégré region (then and now) in 2000 [88,000 hectares], there is no forest left; it's all cocoa, or some coffee and rubber. In Goin-Débé [133,170 hectares], it's the same thing. There's maybe 10,000 hectares that is still forest. Cavally [64,200 hectares] was better protected, but there has recently been a big infiltration there.”

Much of SODEFOR's workforce consists of forestry agents (Corps Eaux et Forêts), a uniformed service under the Water and Forests Ministry. A Forest Management Unit oversees each protected forest, although given SODEFOR's limited resources these units often only comprise a handful of forestry officers. While eviction operations and patrols in protected forests are typically led by officers from the Forest Management Unit, SODEFOR also often uses civilian laborers from nearby villages who can assist in destroying plantations and evicting farmers. For larger-scale operations, or for patrols in insecure areas, officers from the Forest Management Unit may be assisted by forestry agents brought in from another location, or by soldiers from the Ivorian army.

In addition to protected forests, Côte d'Ivoire has national parks, administered by the National Office for Parks and Reserves (Office Ivoirien des Parcs et Réserves) under the Environment and Sustainable Development Ministry. Certain national parks, most infamously Mont Péko in western Côte d'Ivoire, have also been used for significant illegal cocoa production and have been targeted for upcoming evictions.

The occupation and exploitation of protected forests occurred in several stages. Multiple community leaders interviewed by Human Rights Watch and RAIDH said that their communities settled there before the forest had been classified as protected. “I'm 47 years old and I was born in Goin-Débé, before it was classified as protected forest in 1978,” said one farmer. “I've been living there ever since – all of our families' assets are invested here.”

Other farmers said that, while they had begun their plantations on land they knew had been classified as protected forest, they believed the government had ignored their arrival, preferring increased agricultural production to conservation. Multiple villages in the protected forests of Goin-Débé and Scio have mosques, churches and government-run schools, and several voting offices were established there during the 2015 presidential elections.

Government officials and community leaders also said that Côte d'Ivoire's 2002-2003 armed conflict and 2010-2011 post-election crisis had made it difficult, and often dangerous, for SODEFOR and Ivorian security forces to operate in protected forests, facilitating a new wave of occupations. In some areas, including in parts of Cavally, Goin-Débé and Scio, armed groups took advantage of the security vacuum to forcibly take control of large sections of protected forest and sell tracts of land to farmers.

Forced Evictions from Protected Forests

In May 2012, the water and forests and defence ministers cosigned an inter-ministerial policy directive that warned residents of protected forests to leave or be evicted. This directive presaged a harsher government approach toward residents of protected forests, and in February 2013 the then-Water and Forests Minister, Mathieu Babaud Darret, said publicly, “The time for awareness-raising has passed. We are to move now to repression.”

The 2012 policy directive, however, did not give communities in protected forests notice of when evictions in their specific locality would begin. The first major evictions only began in June 2013, when SODEFOR, in conjunction with the army, undertook a large-scale operation in the protected Niégré forest, in southwestern Côte d'Ivoire, with more than 20,000 people reportedly forced to flee to neighboring villages and camps. Credible media reports said that SODEFOR and the army used bulldozers to raze Baleko-Niégré, the main settlement, flattening homes and shops and destroying the local school, church and marketplace.

In July 2014, Côte d'Ivoire enacted a new forestry code the objectives of which included restoring at least 20 percent of the country's territory to forest. Since its passage, although SODEFOR has not embarked on an operation of a scale similar to that in Niégré, hundreds of families living in protected forests have been evicted. Human Rights Watch and RAIDH documented at least six eviction operations in Goin-Débé between April 2014 and March 2016, and several more in Cavally between December 2015 and March 2016. Community leaders said that SODEFOR had conducted large-scale evictions in Scio in 2014.

Community leaders said that SODEFOR generally only targets a specific area of forest in each operation. In January, the Danish Refugee Council reported that eviction operations in Goin-Débé and Cavally had targeted three settlements, with 31 houses burned in one settlement and 21 targeted in the others. At least 250 people, including 92 children, were displaced. A community leader showed Human Rights Watch and RAIDH a list of families affected by an eviction operation in 2014 in Goin-Débé that had destroyed four settlements, displacing more than 140 people. One farmer from Goin-Débé said that, when a SODEFOR operation targeted his village in December 2015, about 30 houses were burned down, and “more than 100 people lost their homes when you include the women and children who lived with us.”

Failure to Provide Advance Notice of Evictions

Without exception, farmers evicted by SODEFOR told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH that they had no notice that an eviction operation had



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been scheduled for their locality or when the evictions would occur. "I had no prior warning, none at all," said one village chief from Goin-Débé. "I heard them firing in the air, and people shouting and crying, and saw the smoke coming from the house. We've lived in this forest since 1975... I was watching the village burn, but I couldn't do anything about it."

One farmer said SODEFOR burned down his home in January 2016 while he was at church. "When my friend saw SODEFOR coming, they sent someone to come to find us," the farmer said. "We rushed back as quickly as we could, but by the time we got back, my whole house had burned down. I sat there in the courtyard of my house in disbelief."

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By arriving suddenly in villages and plantations to burn down houses and crops, SODEFOR is putting lives at risk. Several women told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH that after their homes were burned down, their children had to walk

Village chief, Goin-Débé

dozens of kilometers to find shelter with relatives in other villages. "Their trucks arrived, and we suddenly heard them firing into the air so we ran quickly into bush," said one woman, describing a June 2015 eviction operation. "My children and I got separated, and so I had to look for them in the undergrowth. We had to walk from our house back to our relatives in another village; it was about 16 kilometers."

Another farmer told of his family's hardship and loss since they had to walk from their burned out home to relatives in another village. His wife died several months later. While the cause of death was not entirely clear, he suspected that the eviction played a role:

SODEFOR came to burn down the houses in our plantation in April 2014. We ran into the bush, but my wife was in the early stages of a pregnancy and said that she could feel a pain in her stomach. I told her to stop carrying the luggage that she had on her head, and we walked slowly to a nearby village. Her pain got worse, and so I took her to a hospital. The nurses said she would struggle to survive – the fetus had died and gone rotten in her stomach. She died in the hospital four months later. I'm now looking after our three children on my own – I've lost my land and my wife.

Property Destruction

Victims of evictions described their shock at seeing their homes, and much of what they owned, destroyed. "I lost a lot of my possessions that day," said one woman who had returned from working in the fields to find her home had been burned down. "The mattress that me, my husband and my children sleep on, cooking utensils, and at least 100,000 CFA (US\$167) was burned." Other women said they lost tools and materials they used for home-based businesses. A man who had been keeping money for friends and family at his house said that 1.5 million CFA (US\$2,500) went up in flames.

Although international law requires governments to ensure that those affected by evictions are not arbitrarily deprived of personal property, victims said they were not given the opportunity to remove their possessions before their houses were set alight. They also had not received the required compensation for property lost during evictions. A shop worker whose store was burned to the ground said:

It all happened before people could even take out their belongings. Ours was the only big store in the area, selling goods like rice, oil, and sugar to communities from many of the settlements nearby. They burned the whole thing. It was around the time of a religious holiday, so we had a lot in the store. We probably lost around 8 million CFA (US\$13,360) worth of product.

Several farmers said that they had lost their identity cards and birth certificates during evictions, a particular problem in western Côte d'Ivoire, where in July 2015 Human Rights Watch reported that security force extortion at checkpoints often targets those without identity cards. "I don't know how I can travel now," said one farmer in Goin-Débé. "I traveled to town the other day but, because I didn't have my ID card, I had to pay 4,000 CFA (US\$7) to the security forces at the checkpoints."

Impact on Livelihoods and Food Security

Farmers described extreme hardship not only as a result of losing income from growing cash crops, but also from losing land for growing subsistence food crops, particularly rice. One woman, who was evicted in June 2015, said her family with six children is "surviving now only thanks to the grace of God."

Many evicted farmers said that they were now living with family members in villages bordering protected forest, and several village leaders said they were struggling to cope with the new arrivals. "There will be a big famine here soon," one community leader said. "These farmers were producing rice for food in protected forest, as well as cocoa to sell. We're trying to farm some of the paddy fields near the village, but that will never suffice for the whole village."

A number of evicted farmers said that they had returned to their plantations to find them being farmed by someone else. "I've visited my plantation," one said. "Someone else is living there and farming the fields while we suffer."

International law states that evictions should not leave people homeless or at risk of other rights violations. Governments should ensure that evicted people have food, potable water and sanitation, basic shelter and housing, essential medical services, and educational opportunities for their children. None of the evicted families interviewed by Human Rights Watch and RAIDH had received assistance finding alternative housing or land.

Several women said that the loss of income had prevented them from sending their children to school. "I still haven't gotten back on my feet," said a woman who was evicted in June 2015 and now lives in a village bordering Goin-Débé. "I have trouble feeding my children, and they are not going to school anymore. Without income from cocoa, there just isn't the money to send them to school."

Moussa Koné, president of farmer's union National Agricultural Union for Progress in Côte d'Ivoire (Syndicat National Agricole pour le Progrès en Côte d'Ivoire, SYNAP-CI), told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH that, given the government's commitment to restore protected forests to fight climate change, he was fearful that the pace of evictions will accelerate. Though forced evictions have so far been sporadic, one community leader said: "It's impossible to know when they will pick up again. No one knows what the government will do."

Extortion and Criminality

To protect their land and livelihoods, residents of protected forests told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH that they felt obliged to give SODEFOR officers money or other offerings to avoid potential evictions, while several farmers said that SODEFOR officers had extorted money by threatening evictions.

Community leaders told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH that, when SODEFOR officers visit their settlements, they give them money or other gifts, such as chickens. Several farmers said such offerings were not in response to specific eviction threats, but rather were intended to ensure their village maintains good relations with SODEFOR and avoids potential evictions.

One community leader in Scio said:

I have my own cocoa plantations in protected forest. When SODEFOR comes through, we welcome them. We ask each settlement in the area to contribute something, and then when they come we give them a few chickens and some money for their gasoline – something like 50,000 or 100,000 CFA (US\$84 to US\$167). We are happy to do it because we are here illegally, and we don't want to be moved off the land. I'd say that happens three or four times a year, although SODEFOR came to visit our village only last month, and one of their officers called me yesterday to tell me they will be passing through this week.

Another farmer from Goin-Débé said: "When they come, it's not like SODEFOR directly solicits money. It's rather that you're going to find something for them. The chief [of the settlement] asks the farmers, 'Find something for them.' And that could be chickens, but if you don't have any chickens you give money." Several community leaders called the practice of asking each farmer to contribute to a financial gift or offering to SODEFOR as "paying dues" (*cotisations*).

Multiple farmers said they believed that their communities and plantations had been targeted for evictions because they did not make regular payments to SODEFOR. "We don't pay SODEFOR, we don't pay dues," said one community leader from Goin-Débé. "And our community has been especially targeted for these evictions."

If SODEFOR's decision as to where to target evictions is influenced in any way by whether settlements give money or other offerings, even if those offerings are voluntary, this would mean the evictions are arbitrary and a clear breach of international human rights law.

Human Rights Watch and RAIDH also interviewed farmers who said they paid SODEFOR specifically to avoid a threatened eviction. One farmer said:

If you're able to approach a SODEFOR agent when they are not out in force in a big group, then you can say, "Don't go over in this area when you do your next excursion, leave my fields alone," and if you give them something, then they will usually leave your plantations alone.

Another community leader said SODEFOR had, in December 2015, asked him and the heads of nearby settlements to pay a fee of 10,000 CFA (US\$17) per farmer as part of a SODEFOR "census" in the area. "We gave them the money," he said. "All the settlements in the area did. We asked for a receipt, but they never gave us one." A farmer from the same village said: "Someone said, 'You need to give something, 10,000 CFA, so that we're able to stay here.' So we all gave it."

Two cocoa buyers interviewed said that for the period when SODEFOR was conducting an eviction operation in a particular section of forest, they were required to pay SODEFOR a fee to buy cocoa from that area. "They had a checkpoint [near the entrance to the protected forest] for about a week," one said. "And you had to pay each time you wanted to go in to get cocoa. If you were buying 20 tons, you paid 100,000 CFA (US\$167), and if it was five tons, you paid 60,000 CFA (US\$100)." Such extortion, as an arbitrary seizure of money and other property, violates the right to property under article 14 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

Côte d'Ivoire's 2014 forestry code makes it an offense for someone to create lodgings and clear forest or grow crops in classified forests without prior authorization, punishable by imprisonment from four months to three years and a fine of 250,000 CFA (US\$417) to 5,000,000 CFA (US\$8,350).

Farmers and union leaders told Human Rights Watch and RAIDH, however, that in many cases SODEFOR uses the threat of prosecution to extort money from farmers arrested during eviction operations. One farmer explained that after he spent two nights in a SODEFOR camp, he and two others were released once their families agreed to pay the SODEFOR agents 50,000 CFA (US\$84) per person. A farmer released at the same time confirmed that his brother had paid 50,000 CFA for his release.

Another farmer, who had been badly beaten during an eviction operation and needed medical treatment, was released after his parents paid SODEFOR agents 15,000 CFA (US\$25). Several farmers who had been detained by SODEFOR during eviction operations said their cell phones and cash were taken from them and not returned upon their release.

Physical Abuse

Numerous farmers arrested and detained by SODEFOR also described beatings and other humiliations. One farmer said he had been hospitalized in March after SODEFOR detained him and four colleagues:

SODEFOR arrived and surprised us while we were eating lunch under a cabana. I fled, and they tried to catch me, and as they got closer one hit me, and I fell. Then they hit me on my buttocks and my lower back. Once they had subdued me, they took me toward the cabana, where they forced us all to hunch up and cover our eyes. Then they hit me again, with batons, but also with the ends of their guns on our backs. I was so seriously injured that I had to be taken to the hospital for painkiller injections.

Another farmer, detained at the same time, showed Human Rights Watch open wounds on his shins, which he said were from this incident. Human Rights Watch and RAIDH also met a farmer from the protected forest of Cavally who alleged that SODEFOR agents and civilians working with them had beaten to death a family member, Guetayoaba Ouedraogo, in 2014.

Two detainees, held in different locations by SODEFOR in January 2016, independently said that SODEFOR officers had asked them to pretend to film other detainees while agents beat or humiliated them. "They asked us to undress, or at least take off our tops, and then to sing and dance for them," one farmer said. "You couldn't refuse or they would hit you, and they asked one or two of us to pretend to film us dancing, holding a block as a pretend camera." Human Rights Watch and RAIDH interviewed someone detained with this man, and who said he had been asked to do the filming:

The SODEFOR agents took me to their base, and when their colleagues arrived they started to hit me with batons, and pour water on me. It's only when my friend called our boss, and asked him to speak to the SODEFOR officer, that they stopped hitting me. I was then the one who was asked to film the other detainees while they danced, with a piece of wood as a pretend camera.

Two farmers said they had seen SODEFOR agents force fellow detainees to eat raw hot peppers in January. "If you finished one pepper, they gave you another," one said. "You couldn't refuse or they would hit you again."

Following the 2013 SODEFOR and army operation in Niégré, the then-United Nations independent expert on human rights in Côte d'Ivoire, Doudou Diène, stated that during the operation, "some serious incidents were reported, including the death of three persons, ill-treatment, rapes, extortion and the destruction of property by the *Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire* (FRCI) and employees of SODEFOR."

Jean-Baptiste Kouamé, head of the Forest Management Unit for Cavally, denied that farmers were beaten during eviction operations and said, "SODEFOR frequently has to pursue farmers who are trying to escape or resisting arrest."

They asked us to undress, or at least take off our tops, and then to sing and dance for them. You couldn't refuse or they would hit you, and they asked one or two of us to pretend to film us dancing, holding a block as a pretend camera.

One farmer in Cavally, however, said that his village was so fearful of abuses that they hide in the bush or other villages when SODEFOR operates in the area. "When they come through, we're obliged to hide during the day – we're fearful of them," he said. "We hear the gunshots where they are working, and it's only in the evening, around 5 p.m., when we are able to see what they have done, and what's been burned."

Ivorian farmer by detained by SODEFOR in January 2016

International standards require governments to ensure that no one is subjected to direct or indiscriminate attacks or other acts of violence during forced evictions, and that any legal use of force must respect the principles of necessity and proportionality.

SODEFOR agents implicated in physical abuse, extortion or criminality should be investigated and prosecuted. In March, Human Rights Watch and RAIDH attended a hearing at the first instance court in Guiglo in which six young farmers were sentenced to 12 months in prison for farming in protected forest. During his sentencing remarks, the presiding judge, N'Guetti Assoa, told SODEFOR commanders: "I have heard of allegations that it's only people who don't pay you who are brought before the court...of stories of people beaten by SODEFOR agents, sometimes even to death. You should know that, if these facts are ever proven, the law applies to everyone. You will be brought to justice."

Suspend Evictions to Prevent Abuses

Côte d'Ivoire should immediately halt all evictions in protected forests until it introduces legislation that provides farmers with the protections accorded to them under international law. The new law should specify the circumstances in which forced evictions from protected forests can occur, if at all, and the protections required for occupants, including adequate notice and access to alternative housing or land if the residents are unable to provide for it themselves, as well as the ability to challenge the eviction in court or other equivalent body.

The Ivorian government should also strive for a long-term solution to conserving protected forests that respects farmers' rights. The 2014 forestry code stipulates that the government should issue a decree setting out a process for gradually reforesting agricultural plantations in protected forests. SODEFOR has said that this would enable farmers to become partners in sustainable management of protected forests through contractual agreements that would require them to replant trees, an approach that would permit many farmers to continue to live and work in protected forests.

The tract and forests ministry should accelerate consultations on, and the eventual adoption of, this decree, making sure that communities in protected forests, including men and women from a wide range of ethnic groups, are able to fully participate in the consultation process.

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