

BIHKOV COMMUNITY FOREST

FOUND IN KILUM-IJIM FOREST

Forest Management Officer: 237 677 037 277

Email: lukongmajodafonyua@yahoo.com

Treasurer: 237 653 853 007

President Bihkov Forest Bee farmers: 237 678 172 363

C/o Jakiri Council P.o Box 2, Jakiri, Bui Division, North West Region, Cameroon

OPEN LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE (MINFOF) – Cameroon

ON BUSHFIRE IN OUR FOREST

BUSHFIRE HAS CAUSED MUCH HARM TO US IN BIHKOV COMMUNITY FORESTRY

(February 21 to March 1, 2016)

Greetings from Bihkov Community Forest of Kilum-Ijim Forest where Oku White Honey is produced. Bihkov Community Forest is found Jakiri Sub Division of Bui Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. We write because we have been hit hard by bushfire that occurred in our forest destroying 825 hectares of the 2040 hectares of our forest that is part of 20.000 hectares of the Kilum-Ijim forest. This bushfire destroyed our beehives depriving us from harvesting honey called the Oku White Honey. It also destroyed all trees we planted as a community and those planted with support by other organisations. Our rich biodiversity is lost. Our labour in planting trees over the years is wasted. This bushfire occurred from the 21st of February to the 1st March 2016 when the rains fell.

Our community has been planting trees yearly since 2003 till now. We plant at least 1000 Prunus africana trees yearly and other trees are added. Our community has a tree nursery and so have a source of tree seedlings regularly. Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW) with funds from French Global Fund for Environment planted 4500 trees of Prunus in our forest in 2015. Greencare with Funds from Rufford Small Grants planted 5500 trees of Prunus in our forest too and AFREMID planted 1000 trees of Prunus too. These trees have been destroyed by bushfire. Our community made up of four villages (Ntur, Vekovi, Kai and Mvem) have a forest platform where we meet every 17th of each month to discuss issues concerning our forest. We have been doing fire tracing and patrols but we still had bushfire that came into the forest through carelessness. A farmer burnt fire in her farm at the forest boundary and it crossed to the forest. She was working on Sunday and there were no people around to put off the fire at an early stage. Many bushfires that get into the forest from farms happen during public holidays. This is the case of Nchiiy Community forest in 2015 that occur during National Youth Day from a farmer who set fire in the farm at forest boundary on this day when nearly all the people were in ceremonial grounds.

Our community members had many of their beehives (with and without bees) destroyed by bushfire in the forest.

1124 beehives with bees have been identified as of now destroyed by this bushfire in the forest.

624 beehives without bees have also been destroyed by bushfire in the forest.

45 bee farmers have identified themselves that they lost beehives.

One beehive cost locally between 2000 FCFA and 3000 FCFA without bees. Colonised beehives (with bees) in the forest cost between 6000 FCFA and 8000 FCFA. Each beehive produces between 10 to 25 Kg of undrained honey and 7 to 15 Kg of drained honey. 1 Litre or 1.5 Kg of honey cost 4000 FCFA. If we go by this analysis we can imagine the harm this bushfire caused in our community. The statistics presented here are only for our community members but all people have the right to own and carryout bee farming in any part of Kilum-Ijim forest. Our forest was rich in flowers and many people from other areas placed their beehives in our forest. We do not have statistics on the number of beehives lost by these people, many of whom we do not know.

CAMGEW with funding from Man and Nature – France had organized bee farmers into a honey cooperative called Bihkov Oku White Honey Cooperative and we had been receiving many trainings from her that has helped us to be better bee farmers. The cooperative is still to be legalized but we have to produce our first honey as a cooperative this season. The organization started from village level where bee farmers' executives were voted in the four villages (Ntur, Kai, Mvem and Vekovi) and these executives came together and voted the Board of Directors for the cooperative. Other Oku White Honey Cooperatives were created around Kilum – Ijim forest to add to the existing Oku White Honey Cooperative in Oku. Our production of honey will go down as our beehives have been burnt. We were expecting to enjoy from our production this time that we will be operating as a cooperative with improved honey quality, quantity and price. We have been frustrated by this bushfire that has destroyed our beehives and approximately half of our forest. As a team we worked hard for five days to put off the fire in the forest but all was in vain. We saw our beehives consumed by fire and our labour was in vain. We saw our bees die.

Impacts of the bushfire

- This bushfire has discouraged many of our people from bee farming in the forest and this will have a big effect on the conservation of our forest. The people who have helped in protecting the forest are forest users like bee farmers. We are worried.
- Community members who constructed their houses and were waiting to roof them after the sale of their honey have had their aspirations destroyed.
- The education of our children next year will be disturbed as many of our community members depended on revenue from Oku White Honey to meet this need.
- Many community members will lack money for health care and this will reduce our development and productivity.
- Many families will not feed well because they will lack money to buy the necessary food
- Bee colonies involved in pollination of crops and forest plants will reduce. This will affect food production and forest biodiversity.
- Our *Prunus africana* which is an economic tree we invested in by planting in the forest for the past years has been destroyed
- Our rich forest diversity of plants and animals has reduced
- We have worsen the situation of climate change by increasing carbon in the air without intension although we unanimously fought this by planting trees.

Actions that we want to be taken

We cannot talk about the certification of Oku White Honey as Geographical Indication Product with high demand if we cannot protect the forest and secure the beehives of farmers in the forest. If this cannot be done then we can be sure that poverty, unemployment and environmental protection will be low locally and nationally. In order to avoid future bushfires in the Kilum- Ijim forest we expect the authorities to do the following

- Ban bushfires around Kilum-Ijim forest because many bushfires that destroy the forest result from farms where slash-and-burn is practiced
- Ban cigarette smoking in the Kilum-Ijim forest for it is another source of bushfire
- Take legal action for those who cause bushfire in the forest
- Sensitise Kilum-Ijim forest communities on forest law and sanctions for defaulters
- Compensation of bee farmers for losses incurred
- Support forest regeneration by Bihkov Forest Management Institution and other organisations working in Kilum-Ijim forest to replanted trees in destroyed parts of the forest
- Support trainers on bee keeping to teach bee farmers modern methods of bee farming in Kilum-Ijim forest to prevent bushfire that result from poor honey harvesting
- Increase number of forest workers from MINFOF in Kilum-Ijim forest
- Removal of domestic animals from the forest because they pound the soil and prevent forest regeneration, eat up young trees that are growing and sometimes push mounted beehives down.

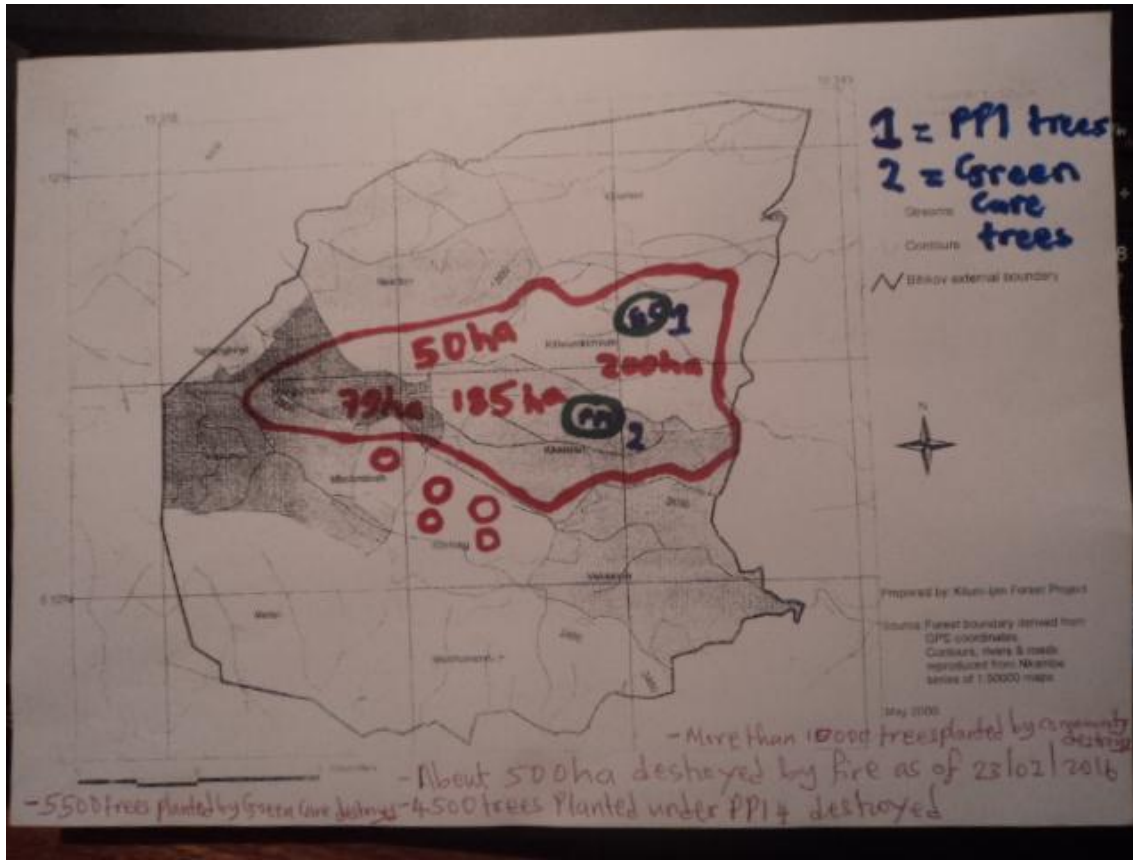
We think that if we value our forest we will have to protect it. We have just presented the case of Bihkov but we know another fire destroyed portions of Mbessa, Akeh and Ajung Community Forest this dry season in 2016. The fire burnt continuously for about six day but was put off when the rains came. In 2015, another bushfire in the Nchiiy Community forest a neighbor to Bihkov Community Forest destroyed more than 1 hundred hectare of forest and more than 500 beehives with bees. Kilum-Ijim forest is one forest and needs to be protected if we want to have Oku White Honey, get tourist and researchers, be sure of good drinking water and join in the fight against climate change.

We call on our government and all institutions with an interest in protecting the Kilum-Ijim forest to help us.

We have attached of list of community members who have sign against bushfires and those who lost their beehives in the forest.

We look forward to your response.

Bikov Community Forest Management



Map of Bikov Community Forest with part of forest area destroyed by bushfire



Community and stakeholder doing mapping of area burn before bushfire is put off



Community and stakeholder doing mapping of area burn before bushfire is put off



