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Kakuzi responds to allegations

Following alleged human rights abuses by Kakuzi's guards in Kenya, the avocado supplier has reiterated its commitment to local communities and a full investigation



Kenyan avocado producer and exporter Kakuzi has responded to an article in the UK's Sunday Times, which alleged that multiple human rights abuses had been committed by the company's farm guards, including murder and sexual assault.

In a press release, Kakuzi reiterated its commitment to the communities in which it works, suggesting that the piece was intended to damage the reputation of Kakuzi and its customers.

"As a responsible corporate citizen Kakuzi does not condone any criminal activities or behaviour by any of its employees and to this end we have requested the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to investigate the allegations of criminality and take action in accordance with the law," the company stated.

According to Kakuzi, UK law firm Leigh Day wrote to the company in August

2019 stating its intention to take Kakuzi to court in the UK over accusations of serious criminal acts committed against anonymous claimants.

"In July 2020, Leigh Day dropped the Court claims against Kakuzi," the company stated. "It has now become clear that the strategy is instead to run a smear campaign against Kakuzi and some of its customers. This we assert because, as far as we know, few of these accusations have ever been reported to Kakuzi or the Kenyan authorities. The claims having been made anonymously has hindered any investigation to get justice for those who seek it."

According to the Sunday Times report, "allegations, dating from 2009 to January this year, include battering a 28-year-old man to death for allegedly stealing avocados, the rapes of ten women, and attacks on villagers walking on paths through Kakuzi land", with former employees of Kakuzi reportedly among the claimants.

In a press release, Kakuzi stated: "In the case of the tragic death of the young man highlighted in the article the matter was reported to the relevant authorities and investigations are ongoing. Kakuzi has settled with the deceased's legal representatives as appointed by the Kenyan Courts on the civil matter.

"The allegations made in the Sunday Times article are against Kakuzi employees committing criminal acts against Kenyan citizens, however the law firm Leigh Day have made it clear in their communications to Kakuzi that the Kenyan legal system is incapable of dealing with these cases. In their view the allegations can only be heard in a British Court. Kenya attained its independence from Britain over 57 years ago. It is therefore unfathomable that a British law firm could assert that the Kenya judiciary is incapable of dealing with such claims."

"We are on record as providing fully funded independent legal advice and

professional counselling services for any claimant as part of a dispute resolution process recognised under the Kenyan Constitution. Anonymity is within this system. In our written response to the Sunday Times we made it very clear that Kakuzi had made the above offer to Leigh Day and that Leigh Day rejected it. The Sunday Times chose not to publish this fact.

"Kakuzi remains committed to its core values of supporting local communities through economic empowerment, the continued well-being of our employees and the sustainability of our environment. We have strong interactive relationships with all our buyers recognising the very important values that they hold. We undertake regular third party local and international accreditation

audits which govern our sector. Reports of this are made available to our trade partners, including Ethical Trading Initiative."

UK retailer Tesco revealed that it had suspended all supplies from Kakuzi, according to Reuters. "Any form of human rights abuse in our supply chain is unacceptable," a Tesco spokesperson stated. "We have been working closely with the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), alongside other ETI members, to investigate this issue and ensure measures have been taken to protect workers."

"We reiterate our dedication to all our stakeholders and wish to inform them that we are committed to professionally resolving any matter which is brought to our attention," Kakuzi's statement continued. "When

things go wrong, as they sometimes will in a company that employs up to 3,000 people and where the land is crisscrossed by public roads and paths, Kakuzi does what you would expect a responsible employer to do. We investigate the cause, cooperate with the authorities to ensure justice for those affected, make amends where we can and learn for the future. This is the proper way to deal with allegations."

Parent company Camellia released a statement saying that it expected Kakuzi to ensure that "all allegations are urgently and exhaustively examined [and] that justice is served if wrongdoing is uncovered".