

NEWS RELEASE



Stop the “oil for ape” scandal

Embargoed until
9:00am,
Thursday 27th
October

Photo Opportunity

Campaigners dressed as orang-utans will be interacting with members of the public in city centre Manchester, from 10.45am on Saturday 29th October.

On Saturday 29th October, campaigners from Manchester Friends of the Earth will be donning orang-utan costumes to demonstrate how palm oil - the hidden ingredient in thousands of everyday products - is driving the orang-utan to extinction. The life-like orang-utans will be involving Saturday shoppers in the city centre in signing postcards which call for a change in company law to minimise the environmental and social impacts of the palm oil trade.

Palm oil is found in 1 in 10 products on UK supermarket shelves, from crisps and bread to margarine, detergent and lipstick. However demand for the oil is driving a relentless spread of oil-palm plantations. This is the most significant cause of rainforest loss in Indonesia and Malaysia and is destroying the habitat of many rare and endangered species, including the Sumatran tiger and particularly the orang-utan.

A report published last month by Friends of the Earth and the world's leading orang-utan conservation groups concluded that without urgent intervention, the palm oil trade could cause the extinction of the orang-utan ape within 12 years [1].

As part of this deforestation, land has also been stolen from indigenous peoples by the Governments of Indonesia and Malaysia and handed over to palm oil companies. The resulting conflict has led to large numbers of human rights violations and there is irrefutable evidence that hundreds of local community activists have been tortured.

Over 100 UK companies are involved in buying and selling palm oil products. Although they have been warned for many years that oil-palm plantations are associated with rainforest

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destruction and human rights abuses, the vast majority of UK companies are doing nothing to ensure that they do not buy palm oil from destructive sources. Not a single British supermarket can guarantee that its palm oil comes from non-destructive sources.

One company, however, which is taking a responsible attitude, is the Manchester based Co-op Group. The group's retail business - Co-op Retail - has already applied to join the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and is encouraging its suppliers to start to source palm oil more sustainably. Meanwhile, its insurance arm - Cooperative Insurance Services (CIS) - is trying to encourage the companies it invests in to address issues of human rights and environmental abuses in their supply chains. It has, for example, asked them to start sourcing their palm oil more sustainably and to join the RSPO.

Samantha Lacey, the Responsible Shareholding Analyst for CIS who has been working on this issue, commented: *"We fully support the work of Manchester Friends of the Earth in bringing this important issue to the attention of the public."*

Friends of the Earth wants to see a law put in place that prevents UK companies from acting in irresponsible ways (such as their complacency regarding palm oil). The group is calling on the UK Government to give company directors a legal duty to minimise their environmental impacts through the Company Law Reform Bill, which will have its first reading in Parliament later this year.

Liz Chater, campaigner with Manchester Friends of the Earth [3], said: *"UK companies and supermarkets have shown that they cannot be trusted to act responsibly in the sourcing of products such as palm oil and a change in the law is needed to stop them acting so destructively. The Government is re-writing company law at present and we currently have a rare opportunity to influence it. If we don't take action now, we will have to explain to future generations why the orang-utan became extinct – and our only explanation will be that it happened because of corporate greed and a lack of political will."*

ENDS

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Notes to editors

[1] The report, “The Oil for Ape Scandal - How palm oil is threatening the orang-utan”, is published by Friends of the Earth together with the Orangutan Foundation, the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation and the Sumatran Orangutan Society as members of the Ape Alliance.

For a copy of the summary or full report please go to:

Summary: www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/oil_for_ape_summary.pdf (PDF†)

Full report: www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/oil_for_ape_full.pdf (PDF†)

[2] Pictures of orang-utan can be downloaded from www.foe.co.uk/resource/images/orangutan_report/

[3] Manchester Friends of the Earth is a prominent campaign group, raising awareness and lobbying for policy changes at a local, regional, national and international level. The group consists entirely of volunteers, and its campaigns are funded by membership fees and individual donations. Up-to-date information is available on their website:

<http://www.manchesterfoe.org.uk>.

Manchester Friends of the Earth is part of a national network of local groups, affiliated to the national organisation (further information can be found at <http://www.foe.co.uk>).

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