

16 March 2015

The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre has asked us to comment on a misleading CorpWatch article of December 30th, 2014, which confuses a specific agricultural investment by Saudi Star in Gambella with a quite separate political debate about general land use and rights within Ethiopia.

A number of claims are being made about agribusiness development in Gambella Province, Ethiopia, which are matters of public policy by the Government of Ethiopia. They should properly be addressed to that Government and not to Sheikh Al Amoudi or Saudi Star. These claims generally use innuendo to mislead the public about the activities of Saudi Star.

The claims largely emanate from advocacy groups with a political agenda, some of whom actively seek 'regime change'. Saudi Star is not a political actor but it is a business concerned with increasing agricultural production through significant financial investment designed to increase overall food security for large numbers of people who might otherwise face food shortages. In Ethiopia, Sheikh Al Amoudi is investing significant sums to create jobs, to train people and ultimately to provide food for people in Ethiopia.

It is our policy not to comment on or engage with the politics of the matter. It is also premature to comment on the commercial status of Sheikh Al Amoudi's holdings in Gambella. The project is still in its initial research and development phase. However, we categorically deny all claims that in any way suggest that Sheikh Al Amoudi and Saudi Star have been directly or indirectly involved in human rights violations.

Specifically, we categorically deny the ambiguous implication that 1.5 million farmers have been relocated as a result of Saudi Star's project, which is absurd because Saudi Star's holding only involves 10,000 hectares of land under current lease. Furthermore, the entire population of Gambella is in the region of 350,000, far below the alleged figures for displacement and spread over nearly 30,000 square kilometres.

Prior to Saudi Star acquiring the lease, the land had been allocated by the previous government regime for large-scale cotton and rice development and was uninhabited so, despite politically-motivated claims, not one single individual was displaced from land farmed by Saudi Star.

The claim that Saudi Star abandoned its activities at any time is wholly incorrect. It has never stopped developing and producing a few thousand tons of rice and other products for local consumption and as trial crops. It is true that Saudi Star is investing \$100million in 2015 and 75% of the 10,000 hectares will be productive by the end of the year. This should be regarded as a positive development in terms of national Ethiopian and global food security on hitherto marginally productive land.

Most of our workers are local, indeed predominantly Anauk, and Saudi Star considers itself to have an excellent relationship with the local community centred on its job creation in an underdeveloped part of the country.

The attack referred to in the article took place in 2012, not 2010, adding to the consistent impression of poor fact-checking. Our reaction to that murderous attack is available at <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/home/news/gambella-farm-statement>. In fact, the attack was not **by**, but **on**, local people and the perpetrators were insurgents crossing over the border from South Sudan, some of whom were apprehended by Ethiopian security forces.

The position of the Sheikh on a number of issues is at all times available on his Official Web Site at <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info> and we draw special attention to the following sections:

- <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/connecting-economies/saudi-star-agribusiness> - our account of Saudi Star
- <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/home/news/saudi-star-denies-human-rights-watch-claims> - our response to unwarranted Human Rights Watch claims
- <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/home/news/sweden-political-attacks-untrue> - our response to allegations made on Swedish TV4 (which was followed up by a specific example of poor fact-checking in our submission to the Swedish Broadcasting Commission) at <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/home/news/tv4-fact-checking-failures>

We will respond to false and defamatory statements related to Sheikh Al Amoudi. To suggest that he or his companies are involved in human rights violations would be false and seriously damaging to his reputation. You will note that in the past we have pursued appropriate legal actions against politically motivated attacks on the reputation of the Sheikh, most notably:

- <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/home/news/substantial-damages-won>
- <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/home/news/libel-damages-award>
- <http://www.sheikhmohammedalamoudi.info/home/news/us-court-allegations-unfounded>

We also recommend that readers bookmark our Twitter account at <https://twitter.com/shmhamoudi>. This will provide readers with up to date information about the Sheikh as we can supply it.