Mr P Polman  
CEO of Unilever PLC  
Unilever House  
100 Victoria  
Embankment  
London EC4Y 0DY  
United Kingdom

Date: 25 September 2018

Dear Mr Polman

We are a group of individuals who were all victims of the post-election violence on Unilever’s Kericho tea plantation in 2007/2008. We have decided to write this public letter to you to respond to Unilever’s public statement about our case. We wanted to write this letter to you as we were shocked when we were told what Unilever had said. We do not think you have been told the truth and we want you and the public to know the truth.

We understand that Unilever says that it could not have known that we were not safe on the estate before we were attacked. This is not true. Before the election violence many campaigners from outside were allowed to come onto the estate to hold meetings. These meetings stirred people up. People became agitated and there were threats to the foreigners who lived on the estate. There were rumours that the foreigners were too comfortable on the land and that the ‘spots would be cleared’. We were told that ‘we would see’. These things were spoken openly by people on the estate and the nearby reserves.

Tribal violence in Kenya is not new, many of us remembered the violence that happened in the area in 1992, or came from other areas where it happened before. We knew what these words meant and were frightened by them. We raised our fears with local management, but they did not listen to us, they did not help us, and when the attackers came, we were left to fend for ourselves. All they said was that we should go and hide in the tea bushes, and that is where many of us were hunted and attacked. No one came to rescue us.

When we fled the estate, we were running for our lives, we could not take our belongings with us and all we left was lost. It was 6 months until we could go back to the estate. During this time, we did not receive a salary. We relied on family, friends or borrowed. We sold what little we had and took what work we could find.

Unilever says that after the violence every employee was given “compensation in kind” to offset our lost wages and that we were given replacement items or cash to buy new items to replace our stolen property. But those who were too afraid to return got nothing and only some of those who returned were given KES12,000 (a little more than a month’s salary) and a little maize, which was then deducted from our next salary. But not everyone who returned was given even this and we were all
told that if we saw people with our belongings we should say nothing. Unilever just wanted us to go back to work as if nothing had happened.

Unilever said that if people could not do their old jobs then they were retrained so that they could do a new job. But we do not know anyone who was retrained, unless Unilever means people who were given ‘lighter’ duties such as cleaning. Unilever also said that “medical support and counselling were freely available”, but most of us who were injured paid for and got our treatment within the 6 months that we were away from the estate. Unilever paid nothing for this treatment. When we returned to the estate we were not encouraged to get help. No, we were told that we must not talk about what happened. We were scared that we would be punished if we spoke about the violence. We are still scared that we will be punished.

It is not right that Unilever has said that it helped us when we know that it is not true. Some of us still work for Unilever, we have done so for a long time now, and this makes us feel that Unilever is not a place for us. We cannot grow here, there is no respect.

If it is possible, let us come and talk to you about what happened and how we have been treated. We will tell you the truth. If it is not possible, then come and see us in Kenya. Come and see the people still suffering. If you were in our shoes then what would you say now and how would you feel?

If Unilever is a company that says it helps and that it cares, then please help make this true of us.

Yours sincerely,

Signed on behalf of the Victims’ Committee
25 September 2018

cc. Kimao Cha Sheria
    Redress
    Leigh Day
    Rainforest Alliance