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Sotacib,  
1 Rue Lac Victoria, Tunis 1053  
Tareq Elba  
General Manager

Dear Sir,

First of all, we thank you for taking the time to respond to the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre who forwarded to your attention our previous [statement](#)<sup>1</sup> documenting the impact of the cement plant SOTACIB Kairouan on the wellbeing of the community of Ruwaisat, Shabika delegation, Kairouan, Tunisia where the factory is currently located.

As stressed in your letter, in the era of fake news, it has indeed become increasingly important for all actors, including businesses, states and civil society to strengthen evidence-based work and multiply efforts to distinguish facts from false information.

To that intent, following the issuing of [your response](#)<sup>2</sup>, FTDES has conducted additional investigations on-site and spoke with concerned citizens, local authorities, and other representatives. We turn back to you with the below clarifications and recommendations.

While we thank you in advance for your willingness to institute a culture of transparency around the activities of SOTACIB, as illustrated in your response and stipulated in the [ethical code](#)<sup>3</sup> of Cementos Molins, we recall on the legal obligations of Sotacib to respect human rights and further call on your collaboration to address our recommendations below, particularly our invitation for a dialogue convening the governorate, the National Environment Protection Agency, inhabitants representatives and FTDES around the points made below.

The environmental and health hazards deriving from the use of petroleum coke and from landmine explosions:

While SOTACIB has obtained national authorisations from the government, it is a known premise that Tunisian national authorisations on environmental issues fail to adhere to the international standards that Cementos Molins is committed to in line with its recent [sustainability barometer](#)<sup>4</sup>. We take this opportunity to bring to your attention this [video](#)<sup>5</sup>, realised by the online media Barr el Aman, that summarises properly the consequences of the factory on the living conditions of the community.

<sup>1</sup> <https://ftdes.net/ar/fej-rouisset/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Letter%20Sotacib.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cemolins.es/uploads/media/B1-Listas/020-Gobierno-corporativo\\_C%C3%B3digos-y-procedimientos/en/1.--C%C3%B3digo-%C3%89tico\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.cemolins.es/uploads/media/B1-Listas/020-Gobierno-corporativo_C%C3%B3digos-y-procedimientos/en/1.--C%C3%B3digo-%C3%89tico_ENG.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cemolins.es/en/sostenibilidad>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-EizP1Hk7Q>

As documented by several sources<sup>6</sup>, petroleum coke, especially when used excessively and stored unsafely, holds major and dangerous implications for human health and causes heart disease, lung disease, asthma, and respiratory disorders in addition to its other effects, such as eye allergies.

We are particularly concerned by the current storage and public exposure of petcoke in Faj Rouissat as the material is being used and stored without sufficient protection nor inspection by local authorities. Further scrutiny must be applied particularly during the cycles of overproduction, which amplify the use and the harmful impact of the material. Our visit has documented harmful impacts from inhabitants who reported their inability to exert agro-pastoral activities or bee keeping due to the diffusion of petcoke in the air and on plants that lowered harvests, made sheeps die and bees fly away.

Additionally, and as attached in the pictures below, we received evidence of cracking in houses allegedly resulting from landmine explosions. Some reported these cracks to result in water dripping inside houses when the rain falls, and we visited a building that is no longer used by fear of collapse. Would you be able to provide an explanation for these cracks and how could you prevent them from happening again?

As you underline in your letter, workers are directly exposed to the pollution and we are glad that you are considering their safety as something of importance. As such, they should benefit from adequate protection as well as regular medical check-ups in order to monitor the impact of their working environment on their health. Have they benefited from such medical visits and if so, could you provide evidence of it and an overall summary of their conclusions?

Recalling ILO's core labour standard on Occupational Safety and Health No.155 we are also keen on obtaining further information from Sotacib on the occupational safety measures implemented by the company to protect workers and the community from the long term impact of the petcoke, including any undertaken initiative to limit its impact on the deterioration of their soil quality and diffusion in the air and surroundings.

Furthermore, the previous response of Sotacib stressed that the company has been measuring emission and monitoring its environmental impact to mitigate harm. We call on further transparency from Sotacib through the display of these measures and indicators, as well as the requirements specification that were followed in order to seek the authorization.

#### Contribution to the development of the region:

You mention that SOTACIB currently contributes to the development of the region and to improving the standard of living of the community: Charity based activities, such as distributing painkillers to students in schools do not rise to the level of sustainable development projects imposed by the Tunisian. Law No. 35 of 2018 on the social responsibility of institutions, which falls within the principles enshrined in the Constitution and the international community, based on the United Nations Charter on Social

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<sup>6</sup>For instance : <https://www.greenpeace.org/canada/fr/histoires/784/petcoke-veritable-poison-issu-des-sables-bitumineux/>



Responsibility, the Universal Declaration of Economic Rights, ILO charters and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. All the same, the community does not expect charity but investments that yield prosperous, decent and safe economies to the region.

Our additional visits to Rwissat have documented the absence of basic goods and services in the region including access to clean and drinking water, the deterioration of infrastructure, the absence of any development project and the deterioration of conditions compared to what they were before the factory began to operate.

We also recall that it is not the first time that your company interacts with the inhabitants, the authorities and ourselves on environmental and development issues in the locality. In 2014, a meeting was held in the governorate on employment, environment and local development. SOTACIB especially committed to finance a development fund for small project within the community, something that has not occurred according to our information (see attached report of the meeting).

Finally, we would appreciate hearing further clarification on what you precisely mean by indirect employment. While you state that Sotacib currently provides for 500 indirect employment, according to our data based on a report by a number of workers, the factory employs 168 workers indirectly, through 3 subcontracting companies distributed as follows: 84 cleaning and horticultural workers, 54 mining workers and 30 guards. On another note, according to our information the percentage of labour force from the region currently employed in the factory does not exceed 5%, i.e. about 10 people out of a 3000 community, preventing the community to directly benefit economically from the proximity of the factory.

Such projects, even if they provide jobs, cannot be beneficial if they turn into a threat to the health of more than 3000 residents. As a human rights organization, we are not against investment but we are committed to the right of the people to a decent and healthy life. We seek to open channels of dialogue to ensure these rights are guaranteed for the current and future generations. As a result, recalling that companies, especially foreign investment projects, must 1) strengthen accountability regarding its human rights vigilance plan 2) take into account environmental and social issues when planning investment projects, and to observe the rights of the residents to healthy and safe environment as well as decent work, **we call on Sotacib to:**

- Rapidly improve the exploitation and storage conditions of petcoke to reduce its environmental impact.
- Initiate a transition to replace petroleum coke by less dangerous materials for its cement production, in coordination and with openness to the initiatives and proposals of civil society and environmental institutions.
- Provide publicly an effective measure of the factory's impact on air, soil and water quality.
- Publicise current figures on emissions, measure of environmental impact over time and requirements specification followed.
- Precisely measure the impact of landmine explosions on surrounding houses and implement measures that prevent future cracks to occur.
- Provide additional precision on measures taken to ensure the protection and safety of workers and demonstrate the effectiveness of the measures taken.

- Contribute to improving infrastructure, including roads and clean water distribution, and provides health services for the community.
- Implement environmentally friendly sustainable development projects for the community and opening up to youth initiatives.
- Respond positively to our proposition to hold a dialogue with the governorate, the National Environment Protection Agency, inhabitants' representatives and ourselves, on the ground of the three main demands of the community which are employment, a healthy environment, and sustainable development.

Again, we thank you for communicating and hope you will interact positively with the demands of the people of Al-Ruwaisat and with civil society initiatives.

The Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights

