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**Titan's search for improvement should be reflected in
respecting the rights of communities and workers**

The complaint filed with the Office of Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman (CAO) in relation to Titan Cement, the owner of Alexandria Portland Cement, states that the cement plant, which is located in the heart of a residential neighborhood, did not receive the proper environmental permit, that local residents endure constant cement dust affecting their health, and that they fear that the plant's conversion to coal will magnify the hazard to them. The early retirement workers complain that not all their rights have been fulfilled, while former contracted workers complain of denying their rights to profits and benefits and of negligence in occupational health and safety measures.

Titan claimed in its [response](#) that Alexandria Portland Cement, located in Wadi al-Qamar, was established in 1948 in an industrial zone and that an informal residential community grew up in the area subsequently. This frequently made claim is simply not true. Wadi al-Qamar is a long-standing residential community, as established by zoning maps issued by the Egyptian Survey Authority in 1944. Moreover, local residents possess ownership deeds for shops and homes going back to the 1930s. Indeed, the opposite is the true. Wadi al-Qamar was a residential area and a well-known spot for outdoor leisure activities and wellness area, much like Helwan, before factories grew among the area, due to poor planning, turning Wadi al-Qamar, and Helwan, into heavily polluted industrial areas.

All concerned parties certainly welcome any efforts by Titan to improve its environmental performance and respect human rights. They also welcome progress made by Titan to meet its institutional obligations in the context of various initiatives, including the recognition of Titan by the Egyptian Federation of Industries as one of

the best Egyptian firms in sustainable development, and hope that Titan refrains from using coal in order to continue to foster sustainable development.

All concerned parties also hope that these improvements sought by Titan be reflected on the ground. Thus far there is no evidence of an environmental impact assessment or a permanent operating license, local residents possess an entire library of images, videos, and testimonies attesting to the massive, repeated emissions from the plant, and they have reports and court rulings proving damage, early retirement and contracted former workers issues remain with no solution or compensation.

In its published [response](#), Titan said that a scientific committee made up of academic experts and civic associations under the supervision of the Ministry of Environment, proved that there were no direct links between the cement plant and health problems in the area. It claimed that the committee found that recorded “health cases” are within the average range of the country. In fact, we find it difficult to understand how the incidence of “health cases”, particularly those related to respiratory health, in an industrial zone and adjacent to a major cement plant could be equivalent to the national average, unless we should consider all of Egypt to be one big industrial zone. It is equally difficult to understand how there could be no direct link between the plant, which emits thousands of tons of dust and gases into the area, and the health of the local community, even if there are other factors involved.

Perhaps these studies drew such conclusions due to lack of knowledge and awareness of the mechanisms and hazards of air pollution. This lack of awareness was noted by the World Health Organization,¹ despite the growing body of scientific and medical evidence in this field. This lack of awareness even among doctors and health practitioners hinders effective interferences against air pollution.²

¹http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/databases/faqs_air_pollution.pdf?ua=1.

² <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/iowa-coal-and-health-exec-summ.pdf>.

Numerous studies have found that proximity to cement plants puts residents at greater risk of illness due to air pollution.³ because even the best technology cannot totally prevent all industrial air pollution.⁴ What even worsens the burden of pollution in Wadi al-Qamar is that the current kiln, was placed on the south end of the plant's land, adjacent to the community, eliminating any buffer space or zone between the smokestack and the community. The plant smokestack is located about 10 meters from the residential area and to the north of it in the prevailing wind path.

In the complaint filed with the (CAO), the harmed residents and workers expressed the absence of adequate channels to resolve problems with the company, and expressed their desire to discuss and negotiate with the firm. Concerned parties regret that Titan refused to negotiate, accusing complainants to be motivated by personal interests and refusing to consider them as legitimate representatives of the local community.

Concerned parties assure that they never claimed to be sole representatives of the community, but they undoubtedly represent a notable sector of the local population, workers, harmed by the company's performance and regret that instead of talking to them, Titan accuses them without evidence. Maybe it is worth mentioning that the workers who staged a sit-in inside the company in 2013 to demand parity in profit-sharing and benefits, were accused at the time of violence, forcibly detaining

³ "Health effects for the population living near a cement plant: An epidemiological assessment," *Environment International*, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412011002856>;

"Respiratory health effects on residents living near a cement plant in Puerto Rico," <https://apha.confex.com/apha/135am/webprogram/Paper166523.html>;

"Health risks for population living in the neighborhood of a cement factory," *African Journal of Environmental Science and Technology*, <http://www.academicjournals.org/AJEST>;

"Environmental pollution and health risks of residents living near Ewekoro cement factor, Ewekoro, Nigeria," *International Journal of Environmental, Chemical, Ecological, Geological and Geophysical Engineering* 9(2), 2015.

⁴ Guidelines for siting and zoning industry and residential areas, Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Malaysia, second revised edition, 2010, <http://www.doe.gov.my/eia/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Guidelines-For-Siting-and-Zoning-of-Industry-and-Residential-Areas-2012.pdf>.

employees, and the destruction of company property. All of the workers were recently exonerated of all these charges.

Images of emissions from the plant:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuLdBY2NhS4>



Photo caption: Workers inside the plant showing negligence in occupational safety and health measures