

**Action for  
Large scale  
Land  
Acquisition  
Transparency**

**PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**7 JUNE 2017**

ALLAT as an Association of CSOs working on Land and Environmental issues in Sierra Leone is aware of the efforts and responsibility of the Government of Sierra Leone to promote FDI and facilitate National Development of the Country. This, ALLAT is aware, provides justification for entering into Contract with an MNC such as Socfin. ALLAT is however of the opinion that the need for promoting FDI and National Development must take due cognizance of international standards among which is the observation of certain Human Rights including Right to Property, livelihood and safety.

ALLAT has been monitoring the operations of Socfin and its relationship with the Malen Land owners and Users over the years , it is also aware of the various advocacy interventions of CSOs as well as the demands being made of the Government of Sierra Leone to ensure responsible land governance and utilization that will promote fair play, genuine Community development leading to overall National development of the Country. There have been reports of tensions between the Land owners, Land users, Chiefdom Functionaries and the role of the Government which ALLAT thought would have been addressed with a view of ensuring permanent settlement built on mutual trust and joint interest of the Malen Chiefdom Community and Socfin.

ALLAT notes that since 2011, the Malen Affected Land Owners and users Association (MALOA), claims that land owners were excluded from taking part in any of the discussions leading to the company taking over possession of their land . They continue to demand a say in the agreement that gave their land in Malen chiefdom to the Socfin Agricultural Company.

The land agreement that gave over 18,000hectares concession to the Socfin Agricultural Company in the Malen chiefdom, Pujehun district continues to be challenged by land owning families and interest groups in that chiefdom.

Recent events in the Malen chiefdom speak of the emergence of two other groups making similar demands. On the 21 May 2017, the Malen Youth Development Union (MaYoDU) convened a meeting in Sahn community, the chiefdom headquarter town, that attracted hundreds of disaffected chiefdom residents including many sub chiefs, land owners and company workers. MaYoDU and the chiefs gave a 21-day ultimatum to the company, instructing all Socfin workers from the chiefdom to stay away from work indefinitely from 22 May until the company reviews their work conditions, among other demands.

As some workers refuse to return to work, despite appeals by the Paramount Chief V.B.S Kebbie, another group calling itself “Youths Affected by Socfin Agricultural Company (YASAC)” also of Malen chiefdom , wrote a petition to President Ernest Bai Koroma dated 2 June 2017 supporting the 21-day

ultimatum and calling for a review of the land lease agreement with Socfin Agricultural company, stating further that the company should leave their chiefdom if their demands are not met. On Sunday 4 June 2017, YASAC also convened another meeting at Gondama village about 4 miles from the chiefdom headquarter town of Sahn , and attended by hundreds of disaffected youths from across the chiefdom. In that meeting, the youths resolved to get better organized and to continue calling for the departure of Socfin Agricultural company if their demands are not met and claiming they are suffering. This has caused a lot of alarm in the chiefdom and tension is already on the rise.

Fortunately, the 'FAO Voluntary Guidelines on tenure governance' (VGGT), reminds governments of their responsibilities to uphold the most basic elements of responsible governance of tenure including to: Promote and facilitate the enjoyment of legitimate tenure rights , Provide access to justice and prevent tenure disputes, conflicts and corruption in land transaction. As Sierra Leone's VGGT project implementation enters a second phase, the malen land dispute provides the litmus test to measure our full commitment and progress towards delivering a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved in this case.

At this juncture , ALLAT is appealing to the government of Sierra Leone to take note of the concerns of its citizens in that part of the Country and be mindful of its Constitutional obligation to create the enabling environment for the citizens to realize their full potentials and to seriously consider the complaints of the affected peoples of Malen chiefdom and take all necessary actions to speedily and respectfully ensure that it convenes an emergency all inclusive Stakeholder Dialogue meeting to resolve the Malen land dispute and forestall any incidents that has the potential of undermining the national Peace and Security which could undermine Unity and National development.

ALLAT also calls on all Affected Groups and Persons involved in the Malen chiefdom Land dispute to exercise restraint and have confidence in the Government of Sierra Leone and all relevant Stakeholders and actors to support the efforts at resolving the deteriorating Malen Land situation.

ALLAT also calls on all development partners in Sierra Leone to prioritise and engage the Government of Sierra Leone in order to search for a permanent resolution of the longstanding Malen Land conflict without any further delay.

**END**

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