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Freetown/Brussels/Oakland, 28th August 2018.

Honourable Vice-President,

Concern: Introduction letter and first recommendations for a constructive process to solve the land conflict in Malen Chiefdom.

Greetings from Green Scenery, a national CSO, FIAN Belgium, part of FIAN international, the human rights organisation advocating for the right to adequate food, with consultative status to the United Nations, Oakland Institute a world renowned Global Policy Think Tank.

By this letter, we would like to congratulate you as Vice President of the republic of Sierra Leone in the new government. We wish to share with you certain concerns, which call for clear political response.

As you may know, since 2011, on the request of local communities of the Chiefdom of Malen, our organizations have been monitoring the impact of an investment project of SOCFIN Agricultural Company Sierra Leone Ltd. (SOCFIN), a subsidiary of the Belgo-Luxembourgish company SOCFIN, in Sierra Leone.

This project, which operates large-scale industrial palm oil plantations in Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District in Sierra Leone, has deprived the communities living in the area from their access to farmland and related natural resources causing adverse impacts on their livelihoods and the enjoyment of their human rights, especially their rights to food and nutrition, as well as their rights to economic, social and cultural development. The affected communities affirm that the land acquisition was not transparent, and that neither proper community consultation nor participation in the decision making process was ensured. We have also observed consistent criminalisation of community leaders and land rights activists related to this land grabbing.

Since 2011, several initiatives were taken by the previous government in order to find a solution to this already drawn-out land conflict but the lack of political will did not allow them to succeed. The Chief of Staff of the former Government before the exit of the regime initiated last one, almost a year ago. Although bilateral contacts had been made with the various stakeholders and a first draft resolution had been elaborated, the process was however stopped without any formal reason, leaving the communities alone to defend their rights before the company.

The change of government brings us hope for the resolution of this conflict. This is an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate, nationally and internationally, the government's commitment for human rights, social justice and land governance. We very much welcome the mandate you gave to Mr Mohamed K. Alie (Resident Minister – South) to initiate an investigation on the Malen situation.

Indeed, we have been asking for an independent investigation for years now, and this will be a crucial first step to re-establish social peace and put an end to human rights violations.

Keeping in mind the failed attempts of conflict resolution, we would like to draw your attention to the importance, from this first stage, of ensuring the independence and impartiality of the overall process:

- With respect to the investigation that took place:
 - We regret the non involvement of representatives from national (e.g. Human rights Commission of SL) or relevant United Nations agencies, which would have been important to ensure the impartiality of the investigation;
 - In combination with the requests for information addressed to Green Scenery, it would have been appropriate to involve national and/or international civil society organizations chosen by the communities in order to ensure the effective consideration of the demands of affected communities.

We are persuaded that these two aspects can still be included in the next stages of the process, which will lead to a solution to the Malen conflict.

- For the conflict resolution process: we are convinced that a long-term solution will only be found within the framework of an innovative global conflict resolution mechanism, based on human rights, involving independent actors, and enabling communities to be supported in their participation. We are open to engage with you in this reflection.
- For the outcome: the general objective of the process as a whole has to be the revision of the Land-lease Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding.

Always in this concern to guarantee the transparency and impartiality of this process, we reiterate here the request made by MALOA (and echoed on several occasions by national and international partners) to give access to the fundamental documents underlying SOCFIN's presence in the Chiefdom of Malen: the 3 land lease contracts signed between the State, SOCFIN and the communities, the lists of affected persons, their plots ceded and compensation paid and the lists of annual payments made to land owners and other authorities.

We would like to humbly offer our support and advice in this process. First, by providing you with the reports and figures published since 2011 on the situation in Malen which have already been presented to the Office of the President through the request of the Secretary to the President, but above all to reflect with you on the appropriate mechanism to put in place to resolve this conflict in a sustainable manner in the interest of the communities and people of Sierra Leone as a whole.

Honourable Vice-President, we thank you for your attention and kindly request you to keep us informed about the next steps.

Yours Faithfully,

Signatory organisations:



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Copy to:

- President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
- Chief Minister
- Attorney General and Minister of Justice
- Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security
- Minister of Lands, Country Planning and Environment
- Minister of Local Government and Rural Development
- Resident Minister – South
- Chairman, Human Rights Commission
- Chairman, Parliamentary Committee on Land
- Chairman, Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture
- Paramount Chief, Malen Chiefdom
- Chairman, Pujehun District Council
- Manager, SOCFIN
- Chairman, MALOA

Further Cc:

- UN Resident Coordinator to Sierra Leone
- Country Representative of the FAO
- Country Director of the World Bank
- Head of the EU Delegation to Sierra Leone
- Ambassador of Germany
- Ambassador of Belgium
- Ambassador of Luxemburg
- Ambassador of Switzerland