

MALEN AFFECTED LAND OWNERS AND USERS ASSOCIATION
Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District



22nd July, 2016.

Mobile: +232(76)416-267

Email: maloa4ourland@yahoo.com

The Minister of Political and Public Affairs

Dear Sir,

Independent Investigation for Peaceful Resolution of Land Crisis in Malen

The Executive Committee of the Malen Affected Land Owners and Users Association (MALOA) has directed me to write and appeal for your ministry's intervention in the land crisis in Malen Chiefdom. The increasing tension caused by the large-scale land acquisition by Socfin Agriculture Company and the maltreatment of land owners and land users by the company and the chiefdom authorities has attracted a lot of public attention. Many observers are of the view that this ugly situation is a public security threat.

The company and the chiefdom authorities continue to create the false impression that the land owners are very happy and satisfied with the operations of the company. Government officials visiting Malen are told endless exaggerated and polished stories of the schools, toilets, court barrays and other projects being undertaken by the company as part of its corporate social responsibility. The company and chiefdom authorities continue to misinform the public by claiming that landowners "willingly" leased their land and that some parcels of land and plantations were left untouched because their owners refused to lease them. The truth will never be told about the circumstances under which many land owners lost their land and plantations without compensation. The propaganda machinery of the company and local authorities employs stage-managed protests and thumb-printed letters in support of the company, flowery speeches made by carefully selected speakers during visits of senior government officials, lengthy press releases and radio discussions to catalogue the successes of the company, all to show that the land owners and land users in Malen are happy and that the Socfin investment has improved their lives.

The following malpractices, violations and human right abuses have never been mentioned in the Socfin reports:

1. The many land owners who were arrested, beaten, detained, tried and imprisoned for speaking out or for peacefully protesting against the forceful acquisition of their land. This inhuman treatment of peaceful citizens is a the key factor that forced some poor land owners to "willingly" give up the land which was their only means of livelihood.

2. The imposition by the Paramount Chief and company of the one-off payment of one million leones(Le 1,000,000) as crop compensation for one acre of oil palm plantation in blatant disregard for an initial assurance that landowners will directly negotiate with the company for all payments.
3. The pollution of the Malen River by the company and the independent investigation sanctioned by the Environment Protection Agency(EPA) that documented the responsibility of the company and the abandonment by the company of the recommendations contained in the report.
4. The cultivation or occupation of all the farm land by the company in the areas of operation without leaving the 500m buffer zone as promised in the EIA Report and court barray meetings prior to the operations of the company.
5. The nonpayment of compensation to some land and plantation owners.
6. The payment of huge amounts of crop compensation to ghost land owners while the real land owners were given pittance.
7. The improper documentation of the land deal. The signing of some of the agreements was not done in public and copies of the agreements were not made available to land owners. No documents were given to land owners for the lease or on the payment of crop compensation. They were only asked to thumb print "pieces of paper". The land owners didn't have a legal representation throughout the process.
8. The boli land and inland valley swamp rice cultivation by the company falls far short of meeting the food security needs of the people, after they have lost all the farmland. Most people are not benefitting from the project.
9. The mass sackings, slavish working conditions, poor salaries and the resultant increasing unemployment and economic hardship in the chiefdom. The company's much-trumpeted claim of providing employment for over five thousand workers is not true.
10. The removal of town /village chiefs who were identified to be supporters of MALOA.
11. MALOA, a registered organization of aggrieved land owners advocating for land rights and pursuing the peaceful resolution of the land crisis, is not allowed to hold meetings.

Nobody seems to be listening to the cries of the oppressed. What we see is the silencing of dissenting voices and the brutal oppression of aggrieved land owners and land users. The recent resignation of the Country Director of Socfin and his insulting utterances against the government and some NGOs, and his confession that the company is finding it difficult to secure funds, are clear indications that all is not well. The only solution is a sincere dialogue that would ensure a win-win for the land owners and the company, a prerequisite for a peaceful co-existence.

Despite our clarion call for dialogue, MALOA leaders and members continue to endure persecution. In February, 2016, six MALOA leaders were sentenced by the high court in Bo and fined two hundred and ten million leones (Le 210,000,000). Socfin alleged that about forty (40) of their palm trees were destroyed and claimed two hundred million leones for the forty (40) palm trees (minus the land). The company was asking for so much money for forty trees when it only paid the land owners one million leones (Le 1,000,000) for fifty years as crop compensation for sixty palm trees (one acre),including the land on which they grew.


The guilty verdict against the MALOA leaders and their imprisonment was greeted with public outrage. An intensive fundraising drive immediately ensued to raise money to pay the monstrous fines. The fines were eventually paid by the people of Malen and sympathizers in Sierra Leone and abroad.

The aggrieved land owners have written so many letters and petitions through MALOA. The mediation efforts of the Office of National Security (ONS) and the Human Right Commission of Sierra Leone seem to have met an untimely death and did very little to alleviate our plight. We continue to suffer while the company and local authorities continue to misinform the public, pretending all is well in Malen.

We are calling on your ministry to cause an independent investigation of our claims so that appropriate actions can be taken by government to ensure a peaceful resolution of the land crisis in Malen. We have always expressed our willingness to dialogue with the company and other stakeholders. An independent investigation of the land crisis and a political will are critical to an amicable resolution of the land crisis in Malen.

Thanking you in anticipation of your intervention.

Yours faithfully,


Shiaka Musa Sama
(Spokesman)

Copy: Chief of Staff, Office of the President
Attorney General and Minister of Justice
Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security
Minister of State (South)
Country Director, Socfin Agriculture Company (SAC)
Chairman, Human Right Commission of Sierra Leone (HRC-SL)
Office of National Security (ONS)
Hon. Paramount Chief B.V.S. Kebbie
District Security Committee, Pujehun District
National Coordinator, Action for Large-scale Land Acquisition Transparency (ALLAT)