

**MALEN LAND OWNERS ASSOCIATION
(MALOA)
MALEN CHIEFDOM
PUJEHUN DISTRICT**

2ND October, 2011

The District Officer,
Pujehun District.

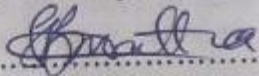
Dear Sir,

GRIEVANCES OF LAND OWNERS IN MALEN CHIEFDOM

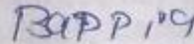
We have been directed to present to you the grievances of the land owners as agreed in the meeting with you, the Provincial Secretary and other stakeholders in Sahn on Thursday 29th September, 2011. Attached is a list of the grievances. We have also included some recommendations that will be helpful in the peaceful resolution of the land crisis.

Please disregard the list of recommendations prepared by the Chairman of the Pujehun District Council, Mr. Sadiq Sillah, as agreed in the meeting. We would be grateful if you could advise the Chairman to concentrate on his council work and stop interfering with genuine efforts to resolve the land crisis in Malen Chiefdom. We do not tolerate betrayers.

Yours faithfully,



Mr. Sima Mattia
(Acting Secretary)



Mr. Brima Lappia
(Acting Chairman)

Copy:

Hon. Shiaka Musa Sama
Hon. PC B.V.S. Kebbie
The Provincial Secretary (South)
The Minister of Agriculture
The Minister of Lands
LUC, Pujehun
Office of the President
Office of the Vice President
UNIPSIL (South)
Socfin Agricultural Company
Civil Society Organisations ✓
Stakeholders in Malen and Pujehun District.

GRIEVANCES OF LAND OWNERS IN MALEN CHIEFDOM REGARDING THE LAND LEASE AGREEMENT AND THE OPERATIONS OF SOCFIN AGRICULTURAL COMPANY (SAC)

1. IMPROPER CONSULTATION

Some key stakeholders were deliberately left out and those who attended the meetings could not freely express their opinions or ask certain questions. The Member of Parliament, the councilors and some heads of land-owning families were not involved.

2. LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

Copies of the land lease agreement and the Memorandum of Understanding were not made available to the land owners so they have little or no knowledge of the terms of the land lease. Land owners and chiefs were told to sign documents without them even knowing the details.

3. PRESSURE APPLIED ON CHIEFS AND LAND OWNERS TO THUMB PRINT/SIGN THE AGREEMENT

The Paramount Chief, Hon. P.C B.V.S Kebbie, instructed the chiefs and land owners to thumbprint documents and repeatedly told them that they will lose their land even if they didn't sign or accept the compensation. This and the presence of armed police in a public meeting in Sahn intimidated chiefs and land owners to thumbprint a document and accept the 'shake hand' and compensation. Some villages rejected the money.

4. INADEQUATE COMPENSATION

The payment of one million Leones (Le1, 000,000.00) per acre of oil palm plantation is unacceptable. Other economic trees, cassava farms and other crops are demolished without compensation. The land lease rent of five dollars (US \$ 5.00) per acre a year with land owners receiving only 50% is pittance and represents one of the worst agricultural policies in the world.

5. HIGH LEVELS OF CORRUPTION

The Paramount Chief is using the investment to his own advantage and is being biased in favour of the company. He was bribed with a new vehicle and he coerced owners of oil palm plantations to accept the one million leones that is being paid per acre. The Survey Team that determines the acreage of the plantations cheated some land owners by entering the wrong figures and pocketed a huge amount of the money that was to be paid as compensation.

6. DESTRUCTION OF THE LIVELIHOODS OF LANDOWNERS

Land is the main source of livelihood for most people. The company is leasing the land for 50 years and gives peanuts as compensation. The plan is to convert vast areas of cultivable land around affected communities into oil palm plantations. This will seriously disrupt agricultural activities in the chiefdom as

little or no land will be left for subsistence farming. Individuals and families derive enormous benefits from their Oil palm plantations. These plantations will be demolished to satisfy the company at the detriment of the livelihoods of the people in the name of promoting foreign investment and development.

7. APPALING WORKING CONDITIONS

Indigenes of Malen work mostly as labourers under near-slavery conditions for ten thousand leones (Le 10,000.00) per day. They are not provided with medical care when injured or bitten by snakes. They work six days a week and are required to report for work each day by 5 O' clock in the morning. Only thirty minutes is allowed for lunch. Employment is temporary and arbitrary dismissals are common. The Plantation Manager, Mr. Williams, is reported to be cruel to workers.

8. LACK OF PROPER DOCUMENTATION OF FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS WITH LANDOWNER

Oil palm plantation owners are not given any document or receipt to show the acreage and compensation paid. All available records of financial transactions are kept by the company while the landowners are only required to thumbprint.

9. NON-PAYMENT OF COMPENSATION TO LANDOWNERS OF THE LAND LEASED TO THE FORMER SIERRA LEONE PRODUCE MARKETING BOARD (SLPMB)

The company is clearing the land and demolishing the palm trees without paying compensation to the land owners. The SLPMB plantations now belong to the land owners.

10. FAILURE OF THE COMPANY TO MARK THE BOUNDARIES OF FAMILY LANDS BEFORE CLEARING

It will be difficult or almost impossible for families to identify their lands after the expiration of the 50-year lease and a 21-year extension.

11. THE REQUEST FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE WELT HUNGER HILFE PROJECT FROM MALEN CHIEFDOM

The land owners in areas where Welt Hunger Hilfe operates do not support attempts being made by the Paramount Chief to remove the project from Malen. Welt Hunger Hilfe has constructed roads, bridges and drying floors, provided water wells, technical advice, seeds, tools and other agriculture inputs for local farmers. The action of the Paramount Chief is supported by the Minister of Agriculture and this has led to the Project Manager, Ms Caroline Wegner, leaving the country. The allegations against Caroline are baseless. The Paramount Chief saw her as a threat to the land grabbing being carried out

by him and Socfin Agricultural Company. This undermines development aid projects in the chiefdom.

12. DESTRUCTION OF THE BIODIVERSITY OF ECOSYSTEMS

The bio-diverse ecosystems will be destroyed and replaced with monoculture oil palm plantations where the land only produces palm fruits for industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All agreements regarding the land deal should be reviewed,
2. The compensation paid for an acre of oil palm plantation should be increased and paid every year, with provision for annual increments.
3. Land owners who refuse to lease their land/plantations should not be coerced but should be involved in the Out-Growers Farmers Scheme.
4. Copies of all agreements and the MOU should be made available to land owning families and other stakeholders.
5. The oil palm plantations of aggrieved plantation owners should be properly surveyed and the activities of the Survey Team investigated to ensure that monies stolen from land owners are refunded.
6. SAC should pay compensation to families that leased land to the former SLPMB.
7. All future negotiations/consultations should be transparent and must involve all key stakeholders.
8. Land should be demarcated and reserved for subsistence farming and other agricultural activities.
9. SAC should mark the boundaries of family lands before cleaning so that they can be easily identified after the expiration of the lease.
10. SAC has promised improved road networks, new job, houses for workers, schools, clinics/hospitals, scholarships, WATSAN facilities, court barriers and other communal structures as part of its corporate social responsibilities. To guarantee implementation and effective monitoring, the company should clearly spell out the description, specifications, quantities, locations and time line for the delivery of these facilities.
12. The supervision and monitoring of development projects to be carried out by the company should involve persons appointed by host communities.
13. SAC should disclose information on all payments made so far regarding the land lease and compensations.
14. SAC should disclose its yearly projected profit/loss for at least the first twenty-five years of operation.

15. The land lease rent of US\$5.00 per acre a year should be increased and the distribution of the rent reviewed.
16. SAC should appoint competent and qualified indigenes to senior position and should give priority to indigenes in filling vacancies.
17. SAC should provide permanent employment with better working conditions for indigenes and should increase the wages and provide better working conditions for casual workers.
18. SAC should provide medical care and transportation for workers, especially for those who live in distant towns/villages and walk long distances.
19. A committee consisting of representatives of the land owners, the company, the employees and chiefdom authorities should be set up and charged with the responsibility of investigating and addressing anomalies in the employment of workers, arbitrary dismissals and other abuses suffered by workers.
20. Modalities should be put in place to ensure that development aid projects are not adversely affected by the operations of the company.
21. To enhance a peaceful co-existence, the current Plantation Manager, Mr. Williams, and the entire membership of the Survey Team should be replaced.
22. SAC should engage in large-scale production of rice, the staple food, by cultivating the bolilands/swamps. A whole department for food production should be established and must remain operational as long as the company remains in the chiefdom. This department should also give support to local farmers.
23. To enhance food security and protection of the biodiversity of ecosystems, alternatives to large-scale investment in oil palm and rubber plantations in Malen Chiefdom should be explored.