

The Honourable Vice President,
Office of the Vice President,
AU Drive,
Tower Hill,
Freetown,

March 30th 2020.

Dear Honourable Vice President,

OPEN LETTER REGARDING THE DIALOGUE PROCESS SET IN MOTION FOR THE LAND DISPUTE IN SAHN MALEN, PUJEHUN DISTRICT.

We bring you greetings from the undersigned civil society organisations working on land governance and land related issues including human rights.

In a letter dated 17th January, 2020 we implored you for an indication of the status of the mediation process which had commenced in August, 2018 after informing you of our continued interest in the progress of the work of Technical Committee and how keenly CSOs were following the report.

Honourable Vice President, as CSO representatives and as citizens of Sierra Leone, we did ask in the letter of 17th January that “we will be very honoured if you can accord us a small time in your busy schedule to discuss some pertinent issues relating to the matter on hand as a follow-up to our previous meeting with you.” We are not certain if you do receive our correspondences we normally send to you and so therefore have with every due respect decided to send this open letter to you and your good office.

We wish to bring to your notice that the Technical Committee report is now public and can be viewed at the link <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/29529-report-of-the-technical-committee-on-the-malen-chiefdom-land-dispute-in-pujehun-district>. There are a number of revelations in the report and we are truly very supportive of your move to resolving this long-standing fester in that Chieftdom, noting that it is the aspiration of the government to improve the investment sector in the country.

Key among the issues that may have always been responsible for the unrest in Malen Chieftdom were touched on by the report, some of which are:

- The questionable land deals,
- The problem with family land surveys and mapping,
- The issues with uniform lease payment irrespective of the size of land taken away from a landowning family,
- The unaccountability of the chieftdom council for land lease monies received from the investor (Socfin Agricultural Company) or the government,
- Improper mill waste management and the report’s improper conclusion about the pollution from the operations of Socfin Agricultural Company.

There are a lot more issues that the report is silence on but as CSOs prepared to support government’s efforts we take this in good faith given the time frame of the investigation.

Hon. Vice President, we assure you of our support as you plan to chart out the next steps for the dialogue involving all stakeholders to the land dispute in the chiefdom. We continue to caution that in 2018 your government inherited a drawn-out conflict spanning 8 years. That conflict has graduated from mere dispute to a track 2 case, for which a lot of efforts may need to be applied for mutual resolution. Already this case has witnessed the death of two civilians from gunshots and 18 human rights defenders (one of whom is already dead) facing prolonged trials in Freetown rather than in Pujehun or Bo city the regional headquarter, South.

We encourage your government to take proactive steps in building the confidence and trust of your electorate by investing more time in resolving the conflict and prevent a future intractable conflict that will lead to insecurity and instability in the chiefdom and the district.

We wish to use this opportunity again to request an audience with you at your earliest convenience even amidst your busy schedule of your active engagement with our country's preparedness for the Coronavirus.

As we await your kind gesture for an audience, we remain,

Yours truly:

Human Rights Defenders Network-SL,
Alphonsus B.M. Gbanie,
Executive Secretary.



Network Movement for Justice and Development,
Abu A. Brima,
Executive Director.



Sierra Leone Network to the Right to Food,
Lansana Sowa,
National Coordinator.



Green Scenery,
Joseph Rahall,
Executive Director.



CARITAS Sierra Leone,
William Dauda,
National Director.



Copy of this letter is also sent to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Dr. Julius Maada Bio.