

**A DECLARATION OF CITIZENS ASSEMBLED AT THE ATLANTIC
CONFERENCE HALL, NATIONAL STADIUM HOSTEL, FREETOWN,
SIERRA LEONE**

THE FREETOWN DECLARATION

We the citizens of Sierra Leone gathered in a Citizens Conference on land and the constitution at the Atlantic Hall, National Stadium Hostel in the Western Area of Sierra Leone;

RECOGNISING that the last 10 ten years in Sierra Leone has experienced a mass influx of various Foreign Direct Investors with the view of acquiring large tracts of arable and forest land for investment in agriculture as well as for mining;

NOTING that the increase in number of interested parties is appreciated as an increase in investment has the potential of generating further wealth, creating jobs and therefore overall economic development;

AWARE that the Government of Sierra Leone has made substantial efforts in ensuring that the legal and regulatory framework are improved to enhance land governance with particular reference to the National Land Policy;

WELCOMING Government's initiative to review the constitution, the ongoing review process presently taking place and hoping that the CRC will consider the integration of land issues in their recommendation;

CONCERNED that the rising demand for land to undertake foreign direct investment has been accompanied by a disproportionate dividend for rural community dwellers most of whom have been dispossessed of land which has had very negative implications for their livelihood and invariably leading to an infringement of fundamental rights of such people;

FURTHER concerned that the final draft land policy document has not been validated by Paramount Chiefs, Chiefdom Council who are the gate keepers of land in the provinces;

THEREFORE we the citizens present at this National Conference on Land and the Constitution to deliberate on Land with the view of ensuring that agreed positions are aggregated and articulated for the consideration of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) as a position of citizens; reflected on and discussed the following critical issues:

1. The safeguarding of issues pertaining to Land in any future new National Constitution for Sierra Leone
2. The draft Land Policy for Sierra Leone
3. The legal framework and Land ownership and access in Sierra Leone
4. The structures for land administration and management in Sierra Leone
5. The identification of suitable mechanism for monitoring land issues in Sierra Leone

We resolved that:

1. There is an urgent need to recognise and respect all legitimate tenure right holders and their rights owing to the very little community involvement in land acquisition, which is compounded by the lack of data on available community land, leading to inadequate knowledge within the community of land acquisition and its implications for livelihood and food security;
2. Cap 122 of the laws of Sierra Leone should be reviewed with humane and none discriminatory clauses inserted;
3. The Draft National Land Policy be formally validated with the involvement of land owning communities across the country before submission to Parliament;
4. There are disturbing incidences of continued environmental degradation in communities where mining and agri-business are located, which need to be addressed;
5. There is erosion of socio-cultural practices of affected communities with negative implications for traditional authority and community residents. Mechanisms should be sorted by appropriate government agencies to work with chiefdom councils and communities to address this situation;
6. Framework for land management and tenure rights as it affects women, young people and the physically challenged be strongly articulated and incorporated into the position paper of Paramount Chiefs;
7. The Ministry of Lands, country planning and the environment should review existing structure to incorporate CSOs in the oversight and monitoring of land administration in the country
8. There should be a national Community entry Protocol which shall be adopted by CSOs and used to guide communities in all future engagements with potential investors seeking land in the communities across the Country.

1. **THEREFORE** we the citizens from the various Districts and the Western area of Sierra Leone present at this National Conference on Land and the Constitution in order to take forward our resolution agree as follows:

a. I. That Green Scenery work with the nominated Post conference follow up Committee to ensure that all the issues discussed, agreed on as listed in this Communiqué be articulated to the CRC:

a. **Constitution:** { The access to land by all Sierra Leoneans including women and youth; all land related laws to be reviewed and updated every five years in order to remain relevant; consultation and consensus must be attained for all land acquisition in communities across the country }

b. **Land Policy:** { Set harmonised framework for compensation for land owners and land users, improved coordination between and among various land management entities of the State ; there shall be inclusion of women and small scale farmers in the land management at all levels in the country; consideration must be given to reducing land lease agreement to 25 years for large scale investors }

c. **The laws relating to Land in Sierra Leone:**{ Land management commission to be established by law to oversee all land acquisition and management with authority to impose penalties on defaulters; establish a special ‘ fast track’ court for land litigation in the country }

d. **The structures for land administration in Sierra Leone:** {Use modern techniques in mapping of all available land in Sierra Leone; District and Chiefdom land committees to be established and made autonomous }

e. **Monitoring of Land administration in Sierra Leone:** { Public disclosures of EIA to be enforced by government; CSOs to be fully incorporated into the national land monitoring mechanism at all levels in the country }

II. That the Follow up Committee ensure that mechanism are put in place to facilitate the presentation of this communiqué incorporating our views and resolutions to all the CRC Members visiting each of the districts of the Country

III. That the Follow up Committee ensure that periodic national updates are prepared and shared with institutions whose representatives are present at this two day National conference on Land and the Constitution.

IV. That the draft Community entry Protocol developed by Green Scenery should be finalised as per dictate of the conference for and on behalf of all Participants at this national Conference on Land and the Constitution.

Prepared and issued at the Atlantic hall, Freetown, Sierra Leone on 24th June, 2014.