



# Green Scenery

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The Country's Natural Resources Are Nature's Gift To Us What We Make Of Them Are Our Gift To Posterity

**Press Release**  
**Freetown, June 27, 2012**

## **Land Owner Protests against Socfin's Operation as Police Intimidation Continues**

Green Scenery, a Non-Governmental organization, monitoring large scale land investments in Sierra Leone, has been informed that a ten-acre plantation of oil palm, cola nuts, coffee and cacao has been completely destroyed by employees of Socfin Agricultural Company S.L. (SAC) in Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District.

The incident occurred in Kassay, one of the villages in the area leased by SAC to establish a large scale oil palm plantation in the chiefdom. Edison A. Mattia, the land owner, says he never agreed to lease the land to the government or the company. And he never received any money for it. Mattia is confident that the land belongs to him and his biological children who's "livelihood had been solely and wholly depending on the plantation now totally destroyed".

The brushing started in December 2011 and ended in June 2012 with the complete destruction of the plantation. Since December the land owner complained against the company's activities in letters sent to chiefdom authorities copying also the company with no effect. Documentary evidence like registered site plans and maps signed by chiefdom authorities attached to a string of letters sent around to local authorities including the Pujehun District Council to prevent the land grabbing have been ignored leading to the loss of an entire plantation along with livelihoods of dependants.

*"This incident is a typical show case for poor consultation and negotiation procedures and the lack of transparency in the Socfin land deal", said Joseph Rahall, executive director of Green Scenery. "Mattia is not the only one concerned. Grievances by land owners that they didn't agree to lease their land to the government or the company were frequently forwarded to stakeholders. Those who have peacefully protested have been arraigned in court with perpetual adjournments. It is clear that there are fundamental flaws associated with the land deal and it cries for a review to avoid further conflict".*

On Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2012, confronted with armed police, community people in Kassay stood in tears and in verbal protestation as they witnessed the Socfin bull dozers bring to an end a cross section of the community's self determination when their plantations were destroyed in the process of constructing a road. The company manager said he was not aware of security presence when contacted.

Socfin Agricultural Company S.L. (SAC) is a subsidiary of the Belgium Company Socfin. SAC leased over 6,500 hectares in Malen chiefdom, Pujehun District for over 50 years with a possible extension of 21 years to establish oil palm and rubber plantations. The company pays 5 USD rent per annum per acre with only half of it going to the land owners. Land users, mainly women, are not compensated.

At the beginning of April 2012 a national conference of land owners and land users affected by large scale investments in agriculture was held in Freetown to discuss the challenges and opportunities coming along with the land deals attracted by the government's pro private investment policy and Agenda for Change. One of the major concerns raised in the communiqué signed by the more than 90 participants was *"there is a glaring absence of free, prior and informed consent in the land acquisition process, and no transparency in the land deals"*.

*"It is high time for the government to put a halt to large scale agro investments by foreign companies. Binding regulations and independent monitoring mechanisms must be put in place to safeguard our communities",* Rahall emphasized.

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For more information on large scale land deals in Sierra Leone: [www.greenscenery.org](http://www.greenscenery.org)