



# 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**

**For Immediate Release**

**11<sup>th</sup> October, 2011**

## **Early Warning: Growing tension in Malen Chiefdom. Police arrested protesters against large scale land deal. Stakeholders should get onto the negotiation table**

According to local sources from Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun district, the police headed by local Unit Commander (LUC) M. M. Sesay have arrested up to 30 peaceful protesters including their spokesman Eddie Amara and took them to Pujehun. They are accused of public disorder according to the Local Unit Commander.

Since Monday evening, 3rd of October 2011, land owning families are blocking the Socfin (SAC) operation area in Sahn Malen, South of the country. The company is one of the large scale investors in oil palm plantation in Sierra Leone that was mentioned in the President's speech held at the opening ceremony of Parliament.

The lease agreement signed between the government and the chiefdom and subleased to the company is a major concern amongst affected communities. Land owners are voicing their anger on not being properly consulted and cheated with information on the lease agreement facilitated by their Paramount Chief B.V.S. Kebbie. Compensation for plantation and annual land rent completely ridicules the value for loss of land and livelihood incomes of land owning families. Affected communities are regularly asking for renegotiation of the lease agreement but little has been done to address this.

As recent as October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011 they sent their grievances with recommendations to relevant stakeholders including the LUC Pujehun, the Paramount Chief, and the office of the President. Several meetings have been held with stakeholders but rather than addressing the root causes of the grievances the issues are either trivialised or personalized between the main protagonists; the Hon. Paramount Chief and the Member of Parliament from that constituency.

Workers, mainly young men, are also complaining about working conditions and safety such as no working clothes and tools, no medical treatment in case of accidents, low wages, and work uncertainties.

On Sunday, the 9th of October, a company representative, Lewis Shilling visited Kortumahun, the most affected village. Land owners stated "no further work will take place until we hear from the company and the chief about our demands in the letter sent out by land owners". Local sources reported that young men from Malen, the chiefdom headquarter, were mobilized and taken to Kortumahun with a tractor from the company. The police was informed about the movement by the protesters fearing violent confrontation. Just this morning police arrested the protesters. "We are being arrested for our rights," Eddie Amara was quoted.

Green Scenery calls on Government and the company to take the grievances of the affected communities seriously and engage them in negotiation.

The Research undertaken by Green Scenery earlier this year portrayed lack of transparency in the land deal. Recent analysis of the agreements of the Socfin land deal either, signed or under negotiation questions their legality, features worrying provisions where the government and the people are disadvantaged.

More information on grievances of land owners and reports on land deals at Green Scenery's website: [www.greenscenery.org](http://www.greenscenery.org)

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