

Green Scenery

42 Charles Street, P.O. Box 278, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Tel/Fax: 232 22 226216. Cell: 232 76 601979. Email: greengreenscenery@gmail.com Web: www.greenscenery.org

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

06/05/2022

Press Release

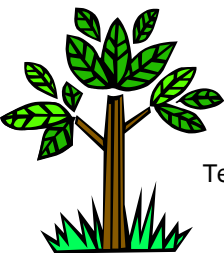
Arbitrary harassment and criminalization of land activists in Malen Chiefdom, peacefully objecting to the RSPO certification of SOCFIN

Members of the Malen Affected Land Owners and Users Association (MALOA) and signatories of a petition objecting to the certification of SOCFIN Agricultural Company by the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) have been a target of arbitrary harassment and criminalization. Green Scenery is concerned about the constriction of freedom of expression of land activists who peacefully advocate for their rights. Green Scenery urges the local authorities to refrain from limiting the civic space of Human Rights Defenders in Malen Chiefdom.

On the 10th of March 2022, MALOA issued a [petition signed by 1,475 of its members](#) to object to the Certification of SOCFIN by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in January 2022. MALOA argues therein that the RSPO auditor lacked independence from the company and therefore assessed many issues wrongly in its report.

MALOA has for over a decade been aggrieved about the fact that some landowners did not lease their lands willingly to SOCFIN, that their local traditional chiefs were appointed by the Paramount Chief instead of through elections, and that their organization is prevented to meet within the chiefdom. While the RSPO auditor, SCS Global Services has mentioned those issues in their reports, they nevertheless certified the company in total contradiction to the RSPO criteria, assuming without thorough engagement, that only a handful of people belong to MALOA.

Since the petition was made available to the public, MALOA members and signatories of the petition have seen their freedom of expression threatened. Two petitioners have been summoned to the local court by the town chief of Hinnai, Imurana Koroma for “*bad work done in my community*”, while another has been called by the police for “*inciting people against the SOCFIN company*”. Announcements were also made to communities, that signatories to the petition would be judged by the local court and that employees of SOCFIN who signed the document would lose their employment. Furthermore, our sources have intimated to us that chiefs in villages that signed the petition in greater numbers have informed these villages that cultural activities will be suspended because of the signing.



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Green Scenery is concerned that a trend is observed in the nature of intimidation, harassment, and criminalization of MALOA members and citizens of Malen Chiefdom who are expressing their grievances through peaceful means such as a petition. They have been the serial target of harassment and criminalization. The right of expression as guaranteed by the Sierra Leone Constitution remains restricted in Malen Chiefdom. The chiefdom remains to be a police chiefdom where citizens including the signatories of the petition are in perpetual fear of being targeted by the local authorities, which suppress aggrieved citizens from expressing their decade-long grievances.

Green Scenery urges the authorities in Malen Chiefdom to refrain from arbitrarily harassing and criminalizing Human Rights Activists peacefully expressing their grievances over the operations of SOCFIN in Malen Chiefdom. We call on the central government to ensure that the constitutional rights of its citizens in Malen Chiefdom are not infringed and further call on the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone to investigate the matter and protect the rights of peaceful citizens.

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For further information please call the following numbers: 076 601979/077913869

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