



HON. SHIAKA MUSA SAMA

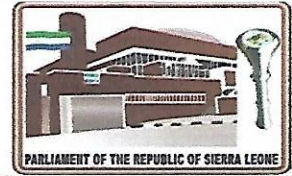
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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6th July, 2022.

The Coordinator
Land for Life Consortium
Sierra Leone Secretariat

Dear Sir,

The Misguided Press Statement of Land for Life

I write to express my disappointment with your ill-conceived press statement of 18th May, 2022, in which you discredited my role in the land and human rights crises in Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District. In your desperation to please your SOCFIN paymasters, in a conflict of interests, you disregarded the fact that I am an elected representative of the aggrieved land owners, with a constitutional mandate that allows me to promote their general welfare, articulate their demands, and to speak up against human rights abuses in my Constituency. I have always had the feeling that you have secret dealings with SOCFIN and I am sure you can remember the doubts I expressed in your manner of approach when you bumped into me and requested for a meeting with me in Sahn, where I had gone to attend a funeral ceremony. My absence from the country gave me cause to delay my response to your statement. I want to seize this opportunity to respond to some of the misleading statements in your ill-motivated press statement.

1. Serious transparency and accountability issue in the redistribution of the lease fee paid by SOCFIN Agriculture Company (SAC)

Your organisation claimed to have identified “serious transparency and accountability issue” as one of the two key issues in the land conflict in Malen Chiefdom. You gave the false impression that the resolution of the challenges around the payment of the annual “lease fees paid by SAC” is the only demand of the Malen Affected Land Owners and Users Association (MALOA). Your statement deliberately ignored the other key issues which were communicated to Land for Life in your engagement with MALOA. The other key issues include loss of access to land, the lack of free, prior and informed consent which led to the use of coercion and threats by SAC and local authorities to acquire the land, inadequate compensation and nonpayment of crop compensation, the exclusion of bonafide land owners and the inclusion of fictitious names on the lists of land owners and land users, abuse of customary land rights, criminalization of MALOA members,

violent attacks on MALOA members, hostilities towards our partners, restriction on the movement of persons and goods, undermining of livelihood and food security of thousands of families, inhuman working conditions, environmental pollution, bribery and other corrupt practices involving SAC, senior government officials, local authorities and some unscrupulous NGO officials, which have always influenced decisions, reports, press statements and draconian actions against MALOA, persons and organisation perceived to be opposed to the operations of SAC and the human rights abuses in Malen Chiefdom.

2. Serious Conflicting political interest debarring compromise in Malen

The press statement mentioned “serious conflicting political interest” as the second and last factor “debarring compromise” in Malen, whatever this was supposed to mean. Your organisation claimed that as an “Independent Candidate of Constituency 104”, I have won twice in the past consecutive elections and that “many political pundits believe that votes in Malen are defined by the grief of the Malen people against SAC and the government that has failed to solve the problem”. You also stated that for me to maintain “political victory”, I have to “consistently stay on the side of the marginalized majority who are members of MALOA”, adding that you have analyzed that my “staunch alignment with MALOA” goes in the interest of solidifying my political position in the chiefdom. You went on to state that “it is a fact that these situation are the underlying reason for the very deep-seated malice and animosity” between Paramount Chief Kebbie and me. It is a pity that Land for Life, an organisation that claims to be working towards “making policies and laws work for Responsible Investment in Agriculture, Mining and Food Security in Sierra Leone” has reduced itself to re-echoing the baseless claims of SAC and my political opponents who see me as a threat to their selfish interests and corrupt practices. Why should your organization’s judgment of my so-called “political victory” be informed by the opinion or belief of “political pundits” and my opponents, and not by research findings from engagements with voters, election observers, political parties and election management bodies, if your intervention in Malen involved finding out how parliamentary elections are won by an “Independent Candidate” in a district you claim to be “supposedly the stronghold of the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP)”? Your statement didn’t report that I have rejected bribes and other favors from the company while others have accepted them to support the company against our people. You failed to mention the several arrests, detentions and trials I have had to endure for speaking up against the land grab and other human rights abuses in our Chiefdom. You also deliberately chose not to mention the enormous benefits the Paramount Chief and other public officials have derived from SAC at the detriment of our people.

Your organisation misinformed the public by stating that my “political victory” as an “Independent Candidate” in two consecutive elections depended on the “grief of the Malen people against SAC and the government that has failed to solve the problem”. It is clear that you failed to note in your desperation to satisfy your masters that I was elected to parliament in 2007 under a political party, the People’s Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), about four years before the arrival of SAC. I have not won two consecutive elections as you blindly stated in your falsified statement. For your information, I lost my parliamentary seat in the 2012 elections due to electoral malpractices and was re-elected as an independent candidate in 2018.

I expected that as “human rights defenders”, your organisation would respect my position and roles as the head of a landholding family in the chiefdom, an affected land owner, a founding member of MALOA and the elected representative of the people, whose good interests and welfare I was elected to defend and promote in a social contract. Who should I support? The people whose interests I was elected to serve or the company that has grabbed their land,

shattered their livelihoods and continues to abuse their human rights? Why should I fail in my responsibility like, according to your statement, “the government that has failed to solve the problem”?

In your subjective analysis of the “serious conflicting political interest” you deliberately refused to mention that the aggrieved land owners and land users have been waiting for the Technical Report from the Vice President’s office since 2019 and that the appointment of the Vice President, Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, was an attempt by His Excellency, President Julius Maada Bio, to deliver on his election promise to resolve the land conflict in Malen Chiefdom if our people voted for him. The people voted massively for His Excellency and remain hopeful that he will deliver on that promise before the 2023 elections. You also failed to recognise the significance of my development projects, my unwavering commitment to defending and protecting the welfare of our people and the constitutional right of the people to choose their own representative in a free and fair election. Our people are not stupid; they know their friends and enemies. They don’t need ‘political pundits’ to tell them who to vote for or how elections are won.

Your hypocritical condemnation of the approach used by The District Multistakeholders Platform (DMSP) in the investigation of MALOA’s petition of the RSPO certification of SAC after the matter was brought to the DMSP by the SAC representative, didn’t go unnoticed. Your partnership or consortium was instrumental in the formation of the DMSP and was involved in financing the ill-conceived investigation. The membership of the DMSP includes SAC, the District Officers, the Officer of National Security (ONS) and other district officials who have publicly supported the human rights abuses of company. The exclusion of MALOA from the DMSP and the inclusion of SAC show that the DMSP and those who initiated its formation are serving the interests of the company for obvious reasons. The speed at which the investigation was done, the nature of the report and public utterances made by members of the DMSP during the community engagements showed that the investigation was not independent and had nothing to do with the DMSP’s core mandate of promoting a people-centered land governance, protecting customary land rights and promoting peaceful co-existence between investment entities and land owners in Pujehun District.

You mentioned in your statement that the DMSP requested for financial support but didn’t indicate whether your organisation (or partnership) gave the support but you instead stated that “it is not clear whether the DMSP received funding from another outlet”. Your organisation was economical with the truth because I have evidence to show that your partnership and SAC co-funded the ill-motivated DMSP investigation.

It didn’t surprise me when you recommended that “RSPO takes a second step to re-engage the members of MALOA, to better understand their grievances and to determine what further actions SAC should take to address those concerns”. This recommendation can only serve the interest of SAC. MALOA is calling for the cancelation of SAC’s RSPO certification which was based on a fraudulent audit process, an independent investigation and mediation, and the intervention of government to peacefully resolve the conflict in Malen.

Finally, rest assured that I will refuse to be distracted and shall continue to seek justice for affected land owners/users and to promote the welfare of my constituents as their elected representative, and will always, as an affected land owner, support all legal and legitimate efforts to ensure that the demands of MALOA are met, and will encourage dialogue and other peaceful means to resolve the land conflict and official moral crises in Malen Chiefdom.

I will leave you with two quotes:

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have little”. –Franklin D. Roosevelt.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world”. –Mahatma Gandhi

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'S' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small loop.

Hon. Shiaka Musa Sama

Copy: Green Scenery-Sierra Leone

Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)

Partners Initiative for Conflict Transformation (PICOT)

Welthungerhilfe (WHH)

MALOA