



# NATURAL RESOURCE WATCH

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*L – R: Indigenous Chiefs Francis Gongar – Zolowee Town; Comfort Gbaye – Zortapa Town; Mark G. Geh Sr - Yolowee Town; Paye G. Kahn – Suakarzue Town; Suah Zaah – Gbapa Town; Abraham Vayah – Bassa Village Town and Felecia Lablah – Gbobayee Town after the signing of an MoU to jointly protect and secure their customary Land Rights in Nimba County*

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## Zogota Verdict: “A Monumental Victory Against Impunity”



***Chairman Dr. Michel Yoboue***



***MDT President Foromo Frédéric Loua***

**Guinea:** The Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform (MRU CSO Platform), has described as a monumental victory against impunity, the November 10, 2020 guilty verdict against the Guinean Government at the ECOWAS Court over the massacre of villagers, in the Zogota community, Southeastern Guinea between Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire.

The case was filed before the ECOWAS Court of Justice for redress on October 18, 2018 after Guinean authorities failed to investigate the massacre five years after its occurrence in 2012. Following arguments by the parties, the Court adjudged that Guinea was responsible for the murder, arbitrary arrest, and torture of residents of Zogota.

The Court ordered Conakry to pay 83,238 euros (or its equivalent in Guinea Francs) to beneficiaries of each of the six murdered persons, amounting to 2.6 million euros. The Court also mandated the Guinean government to compensate 15 other victims with about 3.6 billion Guinea Francs in total, an equivalent of 312,144 euros.

A spokesperson of the massacre victims, Kpakilé Gnadawolo Kolié said: “For more than eight years, we waited for the case in Guinea to go forward... we are grateful that the ECOWAS Court of Justice has restored our rights.”

Reacting to the verdict, the Chairman of the MRU CSO Platform, Dr. Michel Yoboue said, “This verdict is a massive victory for grassroots campaigners whose voices and cries have been hushed in corporate capture across the region; we are calling on Guinean authorities to respect the regional instrument and accordingly adhere to reparation dictates in bringing some measure of relief to the afflicted families.”

The President of Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT), a Guinean human rights group that has been fighting the case, Lawyer, Mr. Foromo Frédéric Loua, expressed excitement about the outcome; but he’s also wary about the next stage, for which “collective pressure from partners in the sub-region must be exerted on Guinean authorities to pay the stipulated amount to the victims within the mandated time of six months.”

He said “the people are very happy about the verdict, but we are hoping that the Government will pay because in the past they refused to pay reparations.”

Foromo further hopes that the Guinean Government will now move to prosecute the perpetrators of the massacre. “We are also expecting to see heads of security agencies and agents of the company who facilitated the attack to appear in a domestic court in Guinea to answer to their crimes.”

On August 4, 2012, Guinean troops ruthlessly quelled a demonstration by residents of the southeastern Guinean village of Zogota. The villagers were protesting in demand for jobs from the exploitation of iron ore in their area, which left them with nothing but, environmental pollution, destruction of their properties and sacred sites.

Local communities say, the Guinean troops, abetted by Vale-BSG Resources, a transnational company with roots in Brazil and Israel, invaded the village under the cover of darkness shooting and killing at least six of the villagers, wounding many others, while they burned homes and looted their belongings. Those who fled the scene were arrested, tortured and detained, the complaint says.

Government lawyers told the Court that the security forces had moved in to secure the mining site and the properties of the company. The security “were forced to defend themselves at the risk of leaving their skin there,” the government’s legal team told the court in writing.

The MRU Platform insists that, as a signatory to the International Criminal Court (ICC), Guinea is under international obligation to investigate the gruesomely murder of these locals by Guinean security forces.

“More than 8 years after the massacre, the Government of Guinea has demonstrated that it is both unwilling and genuinely unable to investigate and prosecute these grave crimes,” asserted Alfred Brownell, Lead Campaigner of Green Advocates International, co-founder of the MRU CSO Platform.

Utilizing the preliminary evidence assembled by the ECOWAS Court, Alfred challenged “The Special Prosecutor of the ICC to get seized of the matter under the principle of complementarity to investigate and prosecute individuals who it determines would be most responsible for these crimes”.

He also implored “the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial killings, to also immediately launch an investigation to identify and hold accountable the perpetrators of those killings.”

MRU CSO Platform remains very appalled by the fact that the Guinean authorities willfully failed to launch an investigation into the heinous crimes, even though the matter was brought before a local judge in 2012.

The Platform urges its members in Guinea - the local indigenous Zogota communities, activists, land rights and environmental defenders as well as organizations such as Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT), Center of Excellence for Environmental Law (CEDE) and Centre du Commerce International Pour le Development (CECIDE) to remain vigilant in the wake of the Zogota verdict.

Zogota lies on the border between Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire and its home to huge deposits of iron ore in the Simandou mountain range.

The ECOWAS Court’s decision on the Zogota massacre is an important message to investors headed to the region for the exploration of natural resources that gone are the days that they will conspire with corrupt and repressive regimes to ignore the legitimate concerns and cries of the people and go without check.

Corporate accountability, especially for underserved communities on the frontline of concession operations in West Africa, is the preoccupation of the Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform. And with the early successes scored by and through its legal affiliate, the Public Interest Lawyering Initiative for West Africa (PILIWA), it is safe to say, hope is alive.

# Profiling Grassroot Defenders

## Muted Voice of Grassroot Human Rights Defender Resounds -As Aminata K Fabba Takes on SOCFIN



**Aminata K Fabba, Chairlady MALOA**

(Sierra Leone:) In 2018 aftermath of the elections that brought the ruling Sierra Leone Peoples Party of President Julius Maada Bio to power, news had circulated around the country that the land agreement signed by the then All Peoples Congress party of former President Ernest Bai Koroma with SOCFIN Oil Palm Company was going to be revoked. This speculative mood of the country was based on the fact that the said land agreement signed in 2010 was not in line with standard protocol in adherence to informed prior local consent. Little wonder why the area has been volatile now and then.

In 2011, Socfin Agricultural Company Sierra Leone Ltd. (Socfin SL, a subsidiary of the Luxembourg-based multinational Socfin, or Société Financière des Caoutchoucs) secured a 50-year lease for 6,500 hectares of prime farmland for rubber and oil palm plantations in the Malen Chiefdom in the Pujehun district of southern Sierra Leone. Activists say the

deal took place between Malen's Paramount Chief Victor Brima Kebbie, government officials and Socfin, without the proper consultation of the area's 30 communities, which are home to almost 50,000 inhabitants. Sierra Leone's farmers continue to fight multinational land grabs - Equal Times

It was therefore not surprising that the new government upon assuming power sought to respond to a deep-seated land controversy. Current Vice President Juldeh Jalloh was then dispatched to the Malen chiefdom headquarter township of Sahn in the Pujehun district, southern Sierra Leone. This is where SOCFIN Agriculture Company operates a mill producing undisclosed tons of palm oil for export.

The Company organized a stage-managed fanfare to welcome the Vice President on that sunny day. They wanted to spin a yarn to make-believe- all was fine, the locals are happy... So, the drums were sounding, the motor-bikes and vehicles hooting. Amidst the din, one muted voice was discernible at the portal of the township. She was the lone voice that was out to protest against SOCFIN and tried to draw the attention of the Vice President to her message. In her typical traditional woman style of dress- brown lappa suit and matching head tie, keen observers saw her frolicking in the air, trying to capture attention. She was chanting in a fit of frenzy like saying to the Vice President: "don't be deceived, we are victims, hear our story before going to the oil mill..."

But the Vice-Presidential motorcade sped on without noticing Aminata K Fabba in her 40s. She is the Chairlady of the Malen Land Owners Association, (MALOA). She qualifies to be labeled as frontline grassroots land rights defender in the southern provincial district of Pujehun.

There she stood in the hot burning sun, pretty despondent and lost in the whirlpool of dust emitted by the convoy of screeching speeding tires of the Vice-Presidential motorcade. The Vice President was taken on conducted tour of the plantation and oil mill facilities. Whatever became of the Veep's findings remains a little-known story. But what followed has been the progressive expansion of the company, including efforts to break down all grassroots structures of dissent using State security.

The Police and army were recently involved in payment of controversial land lease fee of USD2.50 per hectare as against the legally stipulated USD 12 per hectare. The policy in force recommends a price of 12 US\$ per hectare, which the law (Cap 122) requires investors to pay directly to the District Council, then responsible for further distribution.

After the Vice President left Malen chiefdom, Aminata Fabba, Chairlady of Malen Land Owners Association had the opportunity to speak out at the First Peoples' Hearing of Mano River CSO Platform. She was invited by Green Advocate International, operating a subregional secretariat in Monrovia.

The Makeni event offered grassroot frontline defenders' space to tell their stories, their ordeals in challenging land grabs and environmental degradation. They spoke out to find protection and redress in dealing with the abuses and violations.

In her testimony, Aminata Fabba disclosed that they are suffering in the hands of SOCFIN and referenced the 2018 International Women's Day, when they suffered the consequences of tear gas canister explosion from the police. She said they were appalled by the fact that their Paramount Chief - who should have defended them - could not do anything as he is complicit in the unfair land deal that has disposed them of their means of livelihood. She said in another skirmish in January 2019, two of their supporters of MALOA were reportedly shot dead by the army at a place called Jao Junction.

According to Aminata Fabba, their leader of MALOA and Member of Parliament had informed them about a constituency allotment to construct an office in the chiefdom. She claimed that saboteurs, apparently instigated by SOCFIN, launched a disinformation campaign to disrupt their plan to celebrate the good news. The army disrupted their mass meeting, leading to the death of two people. Other members of MALOA went on exile in neighboring Sowa chiefdom, she explained.

Aminata Fabba also explained eighteen of the members were framed with criminal charges and sent to court. She lamented the fact that because of the terroristic tactics masterminded by SOCFIN, their children have missed out on school during their stay in exile.

Aminata Fabba story is one of bravado and fortitude in adversity of a woman standing up for something that transcends the personal. She has dared to go against the fray in looking for avenues to raise awareness and concern over an unfair land agreement which details were not fully explained to the landholding families.

Nowadays, the community is fighting the implications of the land evictions they faced, while struggling with poverty and the lack of access to primary livelihood.

MALOA complained in a social media post that SOCFIN is opposed to grassroot frontline defenders' attendance of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, (RSPO). This is a red flag raised by the embattled founder of MALOA, Hon. Siaka Sama, who had in the past been imprisoned for his trenchant advocacy against the company using MALOA that Aminata Fabba is chairlady. What is happening in the company's maneuvers to divide the group is an affirmation of the testimonies of Aminata at the Makeni Peoples summit.

## In Nimba: Seven Communities Standing Together for Land Rights - Sign MoU to Secure Land Deeds



**Liberia:** “We want to protect our lands for future generation and get our due benefit from [Foreign] concession companies that are now showing interest to invest in our communities. we (also) want to live in harmony with our neighbors and be assured of socio-economic good when we have documents that support our claims to our lands.” The voice of female Town Chief Comfort Gbye, of Zortapa Town, Nimba County.

Chief Comfort Gbye was speaking at the occasion for the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between more than six communities linked to the Blei Community Forest climaxing the process for Community Self Identification authorized under the 2018 Liberia Land rights Act (LRA). The program was held on November 28, 2020 in city of Sanniquelle, Nimba County to formalize arrangements to work together along with their neighboring communities to identify and secure their customary land rights.

Local and indigenous communities have for decades faced challenges to secure, gain recognition and formalize their land rights which have led to resource-based violence across many agriculture, forestry and mining concessions in Liberia resulting in heightened tension between community members and concession holders on the one hand and community members and government on the other. It has also contributed to the worsening poverty situation of marginal and vulnerable forest-dependent peoples mostly in the rural areas, threatening the food security, religion, culture, customs and livelihoods of rural communities at the same time precipitating series of conflicts, contest, complaints, grievances and protests.

From Grand Cape Mount to Grand Gedeh; from Sinoe to Grand Bassa; from Margibi to Maryland; from Bong to Nimba counties – there are cries that concession companies have dispossessed indigenous people of the lands they depend upon for farming and their livelihood. But With the passage of the Land Rights Act, indigenous peoples were delivered the tool and the legal authority to seek recognition, secure and formalize their customary forest lands and natural resources.

To strengthen their quest for self-determination, Green Advocates International (GAI), a public interest environmental law, human and rights organization is supporting more than six communities in Nimba County to mobilize primary communities around the Blei forest area to engage in “Community Self Identification (CSI)” to secure their lands. The process of self-identifying is the first step in supporting customary tenure recognition as stipulated under the Land Rights Act 2018.

GAI secured a grant from USAID through Tetra Tech to carry out a project titled, “Supporting Customary Tenure Recognition in Nimba County.” This grant is part of a larger USAID funded project called Liberia Integrated Land and Resource Governance (ILRG), which provides technical assistance services to improve land and resource governance, strengthen property rights, and build resilient livelihoods as the foundation for strong economic growth, stability, and resilience.

The primary communities targeted by the grant are: Bassa Village, Gbapa, Gbobayee, Suakarzue, Yolowee, Zolowee and Zortapa. The seven communities met on November 28, 2020 in the administrative hall of Sanniquelle to formalize arrangements to work together along with their neighbors to identify and secure their lands. During the program, Sanniquelle City Mayor, Mariam Kamara-Sendolo was excited about the gathering as she made welcome remarks.

Green Advocates International Project Manager in charge of the USAID Tetra Tech supported pilot intervention, John Nimly Brownell said that the grant covers a period of fifteen months under the Integrated Land and Resource Governance scheme of the USAID Tetra Tech supported pilot. Providing an overview of the activities that preceded the signing of the memorandum of understanding, John said at the inception stage of the project, Green Advocates International organized series of community based targeted entry actions step which were necessary to debrief all relevant actors in the process to get their buy-in for the roll out.

In the interest of a transparent and participatory approach to the project, he said further meetings were held in each of the seven primary and neighboring communities to deepen the understanding of the community members about issues relative to community self-identification, land and resource governance structures, boundary harmonization / demarcation and the ultimate goal of securing deeds at the climax of the project, main streaming gender and factoring in women during the stakeholders mapping process.

He emphasized that two trained and equipped community animators (male and female) were deployed in each of the targeted towns, to educate their respective communities on land rights to set process in motion. This decision was to fill gaps in knowledge transmission. Communities were also trained on the legal frameworks relative to land rights, gender, customary and inheritance rights.

This action led to the nomination and training of fourteen Interim Community Coordinators, (ICC) to serve as liaison between their respective communities and Green Advocates International, until at the latter stage, when the land governance structure will be formally institutionalized for all primary targeted communities.

To strengthen the harmonization safeguard of the scheme, Community Land Boundary Committees comprising of two women, two youth and two men respectively were also set up in each town by community members without hitches.

In the process of Community Self Identification towards the acquisition of deeds, critical decisions were taken with some towns agreeing to merge. This means the merged towns of Bassa village and Gbapa, have agreed to be referred to as “Gbassa” in obtaining one land deed at the end of the process.

“For the fact that we have agreed to join Bassa Village as one community means that we are fully prepared to get our customary land deed,” said Suah Zaah, Gbapa Town Chief. While Chief Abraham Vayah of Bassa Village said: “...I would like to say a big thank you to GAI and the LLA for this project. Bassa Village is ready for peace in order to get her customary land deed.” The communities of Gbobayee and Suakarzue will similarly join to acquire land deeds to be referred to as “Gbosua-Gbeleyee- Blein.”

Chief Paye Kahn of Suakarzue pointed out that: “Since 2019 up to presence Green Advocates has been working with us. Today we have come to sign a memorandum of understanding as the first step that we want to get deed for our customary land. The people of Suakarzue are happy to form part of this historic event.”

Chief Felecia Lablah of Gbobayee Town was also full of praise for Green Advocates for their efforts to secure their inheritance. “... The people of Gbobayee are very happy to go through the entire process without confusion because we want to get our customary land deed.”

The signing of the MOU climaxes Community Self-Identification phase of the methodology of the Liberian Land Authority six steps in acquiring customary land deeds. Signatories of the seven Blei Communities MoU from the

towns included the Town Chiefs, Chairlady, Youth Chair, Sub-unit Chief, ICC Members. In addition, local leaders that signed were the District Commissioners and County Land Authority as well as customary leaders that included Paramount Chiefs and Clan Chiefs.

The next step according to the Guidelines on Community-Self Identification under the Land Rights Act (LRA) will be facilitating the communities on the process of drafting their bye-laws. This approach will accommodate customary and national laws within the bye-laws. Institutional arrangements and governance structures will be set-up for the governance and management of the communities' customary land and natural resources referred to as called the Community Land Development Management Committee (CLDMC) which would replace the current interim committees.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by two Nimba lawmakers. Representative Prince Tokpa of District #2, asked an open question as to whether the decisions have been communicated to the people; to which the people pointed to the stakeholder's compositions and arrangements which incorporates youths, chiefs, women and elders that represented the wider community in building consensus on the decision reached to self-identify and opt for customary land deed. The right of women to land inheritance was also stressed as something that must not be ignored.

The other Lawmaker, Joseph Nyan Somwarbi of District #3 remarked: "This should be a pilot project but we think Green Advocates should be magnanimous enough to extend to other communities in the county." He lamented the fact that the state has been ignoring local concerns "by signing land agreement that ignore prior informed consent of locals, which must not be the trend anymore."

He described the project idea as "a brilliant initiative that will ensure that potential investors will sit with the people to negotiate for concession deals rather than the government doing it on your behalf." But cautioned that those to be installed in the Land Governance Committees must be people of integrity. "They must not be people that will subvert the good intentions of this process."

The Chairman of the Lands Authority Atty J. Adams Manobah, Sr. clarified concerns: "The decision to join towns is voluntary and applies to the project objective of securing customary land deeds. However, that must NOT in any way alter existing laws that relate to political and administrative boundary delimitations." He warned: "If there would arise any contention about the arrangement, then there is bound to be an LLA review of the process for harmony to thrive."

Joining other speakers who lauded the effort of Green Advocates International for making the signing of the MoU possible, the County Land Administrator, Eddie Beangar, declared that: "If such as system that is about to be put in place was considered in the past, the problems associated with the ArcelorMittal concession agreement would have been averted."

The project is being implemented in collaboration with the Liberia Land Authority (LLA) and entails community empowerment, including provision of legal education regarding rights and responsibilities in the context of decentralized land management via the Land Rights Act (LRA) of 2018. It also involves the documentation and formalization of community natural resource governance structures, including cataloguing, discussing; amending and adopting rules for community land and natural resource management. The project also supports establishing bylaws for community land administration; electing an accountable governing body to manage community lands and natural resources; boundary harmonization and addressing conflict resolution, including a comprehensive mapping of community land and negotiation with neighbors (to define the limits of community land) and finally pursuing legal registration through completing government land registration procedures for communal lands.

The process for Community Self Identification as mandated under the LRA was designed to correct the historical wrongs of successive Liberian governments grabbing the customary land rights of indigenous peoples without their consent.

According to the LRA, the existence, validity and enforceability of the Ownership of Customary Land shall not be affected because of the lack of title deeds or documents or prior registration if there is evidence, including oral testimony of the existence of a longstanding relationship or ties with the Community and the Customary Land as witnessed or testified to by neighboring communities.

## Meet the Chairman of the MRU CSO Platform



**Côte d’Ivoire:** Dr. Michel Koffi Yoboue is the Executive Director of the Groupe de Recherche et de Plaidoyer sur les Industries Extractives (GRPIE), or the Extractive Industries Research and Advocacy Group in Côte d’Ivoire. He’s one of the founding members of the Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform. Established 2009, GRPIE is now one of the leading non-profit organizations based in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, committed to advocating for a democratic, transparent, and responsible management of natural resources for sustainable socio-economic development in Côte d’Ivoire and the rest of the world

Michel joined the group after victims of corporate mining, narrated the extent of injustices and human rights abuses their communities had endured at the hands of exploitative mining companies. These abuses include pollution caused by the mines as well as

inability to build infrastructure due to the presence of the mines.

The organization works with affected communities both in Côte d’Ivoire and in other African countries, sending teams to visit communities to understand their experiences with mining companies. Mitchel leads a team of 5 people whom are based in Abidjan and focal points based in the main mining areas in the interior of the country.

Michel’s philosophy is to speak with affected community members to hear their stories first. This allows the teams to learn of the struggles the communities face. The teams work together with local activists to help each affected community plan for, and organize themselves to achieve sustainable projects. The desire is to assist the community in making sure that they can understand how to address their collective concerns.

Local organizing is particularly critical because it allows communities to effectively challenge government officials who would otherwise make decisions that would harm local communities in favor of mining companies, as the main goals of GRPIE is to bring clarity and remedy to communities in regards to the law, and ensure that they are being treated fairly.

The group is a member of the Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform. It has collaborated on several issues with the Platform aimed at defending the land, property, environmental, and other human rights.

One of the communities Michel and group work with is the Lôh Djiboua Community in Côte d’Ivoire. Bogbe Denise, a community leader and land rights defender explained the community’s struggle against a transnational mining corporation and the Government of Côte d’Ivoire. The community has been subjected to environmental damages at the hands of this corporation, including air pollution from the excessive dust. According to Bogbe, the mining company also dumped toxic wastes in the community without informing residents nor taking precautionary measures. The Government, as is often the case in MRU Platform’s collaborative work, was complicit with this company and prioritized the company’s mining over the community member’s needs. When residents try to use their voices to demand changes, they received backlash from the local governing body in the form of threats and even imprisonment.

It is because of this type of narratives that the MRU SCO Platform exists. The Makeni Peoples’ Forum in Sierra Leone served as a stage the ideal stage for grassroot defenders like Denise to share their story freely and discuss their community’s plight and dissatisfactions without fear of retribution. The platform would even go at length to provide legal protection if and when it becomes necessary.

The Similimi Community in Côte d'Ivoire has faced similar environmental degradation due to the extraction of magnesium that is affecting all fourteen villages around the extraction site owned by the Bondoukou Manganese company. Community leaders, such as Chief Adou Kouame, have complained about the destruction and possession of their tree crop plantations without compensation, the villagers are neglected and even threatened by the Ivorian Government.

The Groupe de Recherche et de Plaidoyer sur les Industries Extractives (GRPIE) continues to work extensively with these grassroot and forgotten community dwellers to address these plights caused by company extraction and government complicity. The MRU-CSO Platform is working with Michel and GRPIE to amplify these voices and issues and help leaders collaborate to find remedies for these blatant human rights violations.

GRPIE also plays important roles in ensuring that diamonds that passing through Côte d'Ivoire are certified by the Kimberley Process. The Kimberley Process tries to prevent rebel movements or their allies from using conflict diamonds, ('blood diamonds) to finance armed conflict.

He heads the five-member governing Steering Committee of the Platform for the next one year. Other members of the Committee are: Abu Brima, Executive Director of Network Movement of Justice and Development (NMJD), Sierra Leone; Barrister Chima Williams, Acting Executive Director of Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth - Nigeria; Augustine Niber, Executive Director of the Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL), Ghana; and Alfred Brownell, Lead Campaigner, Green Advocates International, who happens to host the Platform's Secretariat in Monrovia, Liberia.

## The Nature of West Africa



**In September 2020, an elephant and its calf were spotted roaming about in the Nimba forest along the Guinean border. They are thought to have crossed the border in search of refuge from Guinea and were greeted by an enthusiastic group of villagers, who were perhaps seeing elephants for the first time in their lives.**

# Our Thoughts

## Guinean Government Must Harken to the Voice of ECOWAS

"Guinea violated the right to life, the right not to be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment, the right not to be arrested or detained arbitrarily, and the right to effective recourse..."

The voice of Justice Gberi-Bé Ouattara, reading the ECOWAS court's ruling is still ricocheting across the world scene.

On August 3, 2012, Guinean troops unleashed a dastardly mayhem on the mining community of Zogota. VBG, the company that was protected at the expense of the blood of distraught folks is a joint venture between Vale and billionaire Beny Steinmetz BSG Resources.

What was the crime of those killed? They had embarked on a protest over the expropriation of their land without adequate compensation. Then the hail of bullets saw the protesters scampering and you can imagine the gory spectacle of people trampling on people. Those arrested were tortured in custody.

How would the Guinean Mines Minister have said they did not authorize the brutality? The fact that there were follow up brutality speaks volume about the ruthlessness of that incident.

The Guinean government is yet to speak on the verdict. Six months is the legally stipulated time frame for the government to act on the issues of reparation to victims and families. The excess of 400,000 dollars and cost of legal representation cannot by any means atone for the brutal incident. It is however a symbolic gesture to send the strong message that locals have the right to defend their land even in peaceful sit-ins that have the effect of calling to attention to onerous land deals that eroding human rights.

Vale, the world's largest iron ore producer has reportedly denied supporting the violence, according to the Sun of South Africa. West African court finds Guinea responsible for 2012 mine site killings (thesundaily.my)

We are saying people should refrain from hollow denials and try to owe-up to their acts of impunity. Let's even say the Police and soldiers that were involved in the blood bathe acted in overzealousness and trigger happiness. Their foolhardiness was intended to appease somebody-Vale and the government.

And what did Vale and the government do to have avoided the mass protest? The likelihood of arrogance sounding like, "let them go ahead we deal with them...they will never forget it..."

Yes, those who feel strong about this issue especially for us at MRU CSO Platform and Public Interest Lawyering Initiative of West Africa have made the commitment to follow up on the obligations of the government to pay the damages of 4.56 billion Guinean francs, or \$463,000.

Beyond that justice can be served when those officers involved are identified and prosecuted using local justice mechanism. That is the new challenge of the government

Guinea has no choice - hearken to the voice of ECOWAS; lest in this day and age of global village diplomacy and mounting concern for corporate accountability, the cost of intransigence for international laws are bound to be loaded with grave implications.

## Ghanaian Assemblyman Narrates his Experience as a Community Activist



**Assemblyman Gyeatuo**

**Ghana:** A local Ghanaian Assemblyman, Gyeatuo Kyenkyenku, has decried the extent of pollution caused by the mining of Alluvial Gold in Saaman Community in the Fanteakwa District of the Eastern Region in Ghana.

Gyeatuo who's also a community leader from Akyem Saaman, a farming community, told the Makeni Peoples' Forum that "rivers, creeks and streams," are left polluted by the Solar Mining Company without care for the affected community.

Speaking as he provided testimony of the scale of abuses inflicted by the company, Gyeatuo said, the communities continuous to face challenges because their sources of water have been polluted and destroyed. Though a lawmaker from the community, he had on many occasions been intimidated and/or imprisoned. "When the Company officials failed to get me on their side, they attempted to bribe me with a trip to the United States of America, which I rejected." He was arrested and sent to prison for

leading a protest against the Mining Company. He was among eight others, charged with abetting and causing unlawful damage of properties belonging to Solar Mining.

While praising women for standing with him whilst in prison, he recounted how he had witnessed women human rights defenders, who organized themselves to protect the livelihood of their communities faced series of reprisals attacks with their children. He testified that even when cases are resolved, regardless of the violations, the communities rarely received compensation or reparation. "On one occasion, a child drowned due to negligence of the company and the company refused to show any remorse, let alone compensate the family.

The Solar Mining Company, which is an affiliate of Kibi Goldfields, on several occasions used the army to intimidate and terrorize their communities. He told the summit that police and military officers in partnership with the private security forces of the Mining Company, "stormed their community at night in the month of March 2011, assaulted community members for protesting against the destruction of their farmlands, crops and water sources by the company." The lawmaker informed the Makeni Peoples' Forum that his community members are farmers who are involved with the production of food crops such as maize, cocoyam, cassava and cocoa but the company has destroyed their land, natural resources and livelihood making it almost impossible to survive.

He requested support and solidarity actions from the MRU SCO Platform against the constant incidents of security harassments and imprisonment.

### Who are we:

The Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Recourses Rights and Governance Planform (MRU-CSO Platform) is a network of environmental and human rights defenders; indigenous, urban slums and squatter communities; communities affected by the operations of multinational corporations; bloggers, labor unions and poor informal entrepreneurs on the frontline of corporate investments in West Africa. Its membership is drawn from nine of the fifteen countries in West Africa. Namely: Liberia, Sierra Leone, La Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Niger and Senegal.

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