

Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform

Press Statement

On International Day of the World's Indigenous People:

-The MRU CSO Platform Joins Calls for a New Social Contract

(Monrovia: August 8, 2021): On the occasion marking International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform (MRU CSO Platform) calls for a concerted approach in advancing the pressing need for a new social contract geared toward combating the legacy of exclusion and marginalization.

Indigenous peoples everywhere must be included in critical decision-making and development outcomes in relation to their lives and resources.

The MRU CSO Platform believes that a new social contract framework gear toward cooperation, economic benefits and power-sharing must be at the heart of the development agenda in every country where indigenous peoples continue to be dispossessed of their livelihoods, while their cultures and languages are routinely vilified, in addition to be being excluded from socio-economic, political, and environmental governance activities.

“We deplore the systematic violence, reprisal attacks and killings of indigenous peoples in West Africa, who are being dislodged from their ancestral lands by the combined forces of multinational corporations and their host governments,” said Michel Yoboue, Chairman of the Platform.

Adding: “These gross human rights violations are perpetrated with the full knowledge of the home governments of these powerful corporations in the name of foreign direct investment in poor countries and must share collective responsibility for the crimes committed against the locals.”

Every year the 9th of August is celebrated globally as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, a day set aside by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1994, to mark the date of the inaugural session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at the United Nations in 1982.

This year's commemoration is being held on the theme “Leaving No One Behind: Indigenous Peoples and the Call for a New Social Contract.” It aims to promote discussion on the need to rethink a new agreement of common sense, based on genuine and inclusive participation and partnerships that fosters equal opportunities, respects the rights, dignity and freedoms of all.

The MRU CSO Platform agrees that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has evidently exposed and exacerbated many existing inequalities, to which indigenous peoples in the same way as other members of populations around the world, cannot be exempt.

Over 476 million indigenous are documented to be living in 90 countries across the world, thereby constituting 6.2 percent of the world's population. Indigenous peoples, according to the

United Nations, thus continue to suffer disproportionately from multiple confronting issues such as poverty, diseases, discrimination, institutional instability and financial insecurity.

As a network of frontline grassroots environmental, land and human rights defenders, comprising of indigenous, urban slums and communities affected by the operations of multinational corporations, the MRU CSO Platform has witnessed firsthand how the dignity and protection of natives are being sacrificed at the altar of so-called investments.

We should place on record that the situation in West Africa is particularly concerning considering persistent struggles for rights and resources involving indigenous peoples and successive postcolonial governmental authorities along with their extractive capitalist multinational entrepreneurs.

This is why on 23rd July 2021, we launched a pilot project in nine West African countries to document and report attacks, reprisals and killings of grassroots defenders whose plight have been underreported, and sometimes failed to make the headlines in the media.

Our objective is to profile these defenders, narrate their untold stories and elevate the conditions of these people forgotten by society in a framework known as the West African Frontline Grassroots Defenders Directory.

By doing so, we hope to tackle some of the enduring problems that threaten the survival of indigenous peoples, which should be the ultimate goal of the whole of society if the sustainable development goals as a global compact are to be meaningfully achieved.

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This statement is written by the Secretariat of the Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform (MRU CSO Platform) in Monrovia. The MRU CSO Platform is a network of environmental, land and human rights defenders; indigenous, urban slums and communities affected by the operations of multinational corporations; 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. Contact: mrucsoplatform@gmail.com Phone: +231 (0) 555139602





Flashback: Indigenous people gathered on a field visit to an affected community during the first people's forum of the MRU CSO Platform held in Makeni, Sierra Leone in March 2019. .