

Chief Minister engages Malen stakeholders, pledges to renegotiate Socfin agreement

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Chief Minister Engages Malen Stakeholders, Pledges to Renegotiate Socfin Agreement

By Amin Kef Sesay

In a major move towards resolving the long-standing tensions in Malen Chiefdom, Sierra Leone's Chief Minister, Dr. Moinina David Sengeh, convened a comprehensive dialogue session on Sunday, August 4, 2024. The meeting aimed at fostering collaboration among stakeholders and assured the community of the Government's commitment to renegotiate the contract with Socfin Agricultural Company.

The session brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including Government officials, development partners, political and traditional leaders, youths, women and security personnel. Held in Malen Chiefdom, the dialogue focused on addressing the various issues that have contributed to the protracted dispute between the local community and Socfin Agricultural Company, which operates a large-scale palm oil plantation in the area.

Chiefdom Speaker of Malen Chiefdom, Chief Robert Moigua, welcomed participants and urged the community to engage constructively in the dialogue, emphasizing the need to set aside hatred, malice, jealousy, backbiting, favoritism and political sentiments for the greater good.

The dialogues provided a platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns and seek solutions. Acting Chiefdom Youth Chairman, Mohamed Elleson Sengeh, highlighted the lack of youth representation in decision-making processes and the marginalization of young people regarding employment opportunities within Socfin.

Councilor Hindolo Sillah called on the youth and women to participate positively in the chiefdom's development, stressing the importance of addressing the concerns raised during the dialogue. Mohamed Dao, representing motorcycle riders, raised issues related to environmental hazards and accidents, urging Socfin's safety department to ensure road safety.

Regent Chief of Malen Chiefdom, Chief Alex B. Lamin, expressed gratitude for the dialogue, stating that while the community had given their land to the company, they faced inhumane treatment and significant hardships. He disclosed that despite engaging with the company's stakeholders, issues such as the meager stipends for town and section chiefs remained unresolved.

Honorable Member of Parliament for the area, Hon. Shaka Musa Sama, commended the initiative, expressing his vision of improved living conditions for his people. He thanked the Secretary to the President for his involvement in the mediation process and expressed confidence in his expertise in local governance issues.

Resident Minister South, Mohamed Elongima Kaindapa Alie, acknowledged the long-standing issues in Malen and assured the community of the Government's commitment to addressing their concerns and supporting the peace process.

Chief Minister Dr. David Moinina Sengeh emphasized the importance of ongoing dialogue and patience as the Government engages with Socfin to address the community's concerns. He promised that the Government would build a larger Court Barry for the community starting this year and assured that the renegotiation of the 2011 agreement with Socfin would continue to find lasting solutions.

The session concluded with Hon. Shaka Musa Sama outlining key issues affecting the Malen Chiefdom, including compensation payments, annual lease rent, alternative livelihoods, revenue from palm oil sales, employment and welfare of employees, human rights abuses, community development, recognition of traditional authorities, environmental protection and grievance redress mechanisms. Participants engaged in extensive discussions and provided recommendations to address these pressing concerns.

The successful dialogue session facilitated by the Chief Minister marks a significant step towards resolving the long-standing tensions in Malen Chiefdom, paving the way for a more collaborative and inclusive approach to addressing the community's needs and grievances.

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