

[HOME](#) › [LOCAL](#) › [LEGAL](#)

Liberia: 22 Communities Sue Salala Rubber Corp., Liberian Gov't



One of Salala Rubber Corp farm

[GC](#)

ARTICLE BY
[GUEST CONTRIBUTOR](#)

.... *File Historic Petition for Declaratory Judgment*

Francis Colee and Atty. Samwar S. Fallah

Residents of 22 indigenous Kpelle communities, dispossessed of their customary land, cultural sites, and livelihoods, have filed a groundbreaking legal action against the Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC) and the Liberian Government.

Their lawsuit seeks a declaration that they retain ownership of their traditional lands despite the government's decision to grant a concession to rubber plantation companies in 1959. If successful, they could set a legal precedent by undermining a decades-old land law that erased indigenous people's land rights countrywide without due process or compensation.

Over the decades, the Petitioners — residents of Gleagba, Bloomu, Dokai (old), Dokai (new), Bondolon, Massaquoi, Martin, Deedee-ta 2, Kuwah-ta, Jorkporlorsue, Gorbor, Kolledarpolon, Monkey-tail, Ansa-ta, Lango, Garjay, Dedee-ta 1, Kolongalai, Sayue-ta, Tartee-ta, Varmue, and Pennoh Villages — have been ejected from their ancestral farmlands due to successive waves of expansion by SRC's rubber plantation.

Local communities have lost their land, their crops and economic trees, their family graves and sacred sites, their access to adequate clean water, and the forest in which they collect natural resources for food, medicine, and building materials. Some communities — such as Jorkporlorsue — are reduced to small islands of habitation surrounded by a sea of commercial rubber, with no remaining farmland or bush from which to make a living.

The Petition for Declaratory Judgment was filed on behalf of the communities by Green Advocates International, a renowned Liberian public interest law, environmental and human rights organization that has been working to support and advance the rights of the affected communities for more than 15 years now.

The lawsuit targets the Liberian Government, which granted the concession on the Petitioners' land in 1959 without due process or notification to the people who had lived there for decades – and, in some cases, centuries. SRC, the Liberian subsidiary of Luxembourg-based agricultural giant Socfin, is also listed as a Defendant.

Socfin purchased the plantation after Liberia's civil war in 2007 and has continued to bulldoze community lands, systematically under-compensating displaced villagers for their destroyed crops and consistently refusing to compensate them for the loss of their land.

The Petitioners claim that they are the true owners of the land by right of prior, peaceful possession. According to them, SRC and the original concessionaire (from whom SRC bought the plantation) failed to limit themselves to "unencumbered" lands as required under the 1959 Concession Agreement and instead appropriated lands already inhabited by surrounding communities.

The Petitioners also question the validity of the 1956 Public Lands Act, which declared vast swathes of Liberia's interior to be public land without affording constitutional guarantees of due process and compensation to the owners of expropriated land.

The massive loss of their land has had dire consequences for the Petitioners and their communities. Parents who once provided adequately for their children are unable to feed their families or pay school fees. Women are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence when they cross the plantation or seek contract work from SRC.

The impacts are intergenerational as well, as the loss of sacred sites and natural resources is creating a break in cultural traditions, and the communities have lost large amounts of reserve land that had been set aside for the current residents' children and grandchildren.

The communities decided to file suit after SRC refused to engage in mediation sponsored by the International Finance Corporation – the private investment arm of the World Bank that financed SRC's plantation expansion. They hope that their lawsuit will vindicate their own customary land rights – including the right to decide whether multinational corporations can operate on their land – and set a precedent vouchsafing those rights to the millions of Liberians living in the 90% of the country subject to traditional land tenure.



- [Jobs & Bids](#)
- [Shop](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

About

Liberianobserver.com is a digital product of the Liberian Observer Corporation. Our print edition, the Daily Observer newspaper, also publishes a wide range of content including politics, business, sports and entertainment on and about Liberia and beyond. Follow us on social media for all the latest news and analysis.

Contact us: liberianobserver@gmail.com

