

# Rubber Company, "SRC's Scare Tactics Won't Weaken Our Resolve"

Says ARD Rights Group's Chairman

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***PHOTO: Paul Larry George***

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The Chairman of the local rights group Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD) says recent attacks they suffered at the hands of thugs said to be acting on behalf of the Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC) will not deter them from helping communities suffering corporate social abuses at the hands of the multinational corporation.

According to Mr. Paul Larry George, the team had been in the villages since December 11, 2020 in continuation of its documentation of the effects of SRC activities on indigenous people "whose lands were seized to pave way for the expansion of the plantation; an exercise that resulted into the displacements of entire towns and villages, destruction of homes, sacred heritage sites, crops and livelihood sources, as well as, pollution of fresh water sources, rivers and creeks".

Green Advocates (GA), ARD, Natural Resource Women Platform personnel and an international partner were on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of a village tour when a group of men said to be working for the SRC reportedly attacked the team in Weala at an entry point to the plantation. But Mr. George described the demonstrators as paid agents of SRC.

When contacted, Corporate Human Resource Manager Jallah Mensah who is also the company's main spokesman who neither denied nor confirmed that the attackers were acting on orders of the company. He simply said he was on his annual break and was therefore not prepared to comment on any such issue.

But meanwhile, he had responded to an inquiry related to an altercation with the village tour team just four days earlier in Kuwah-ta, Dinning Clan, again involving some men said to be working for SRC. ARD Chairman George had complained how the men including one Joseph Penneh threatened his person and attempted disrupting their town hall meeting with citizens of the town.

In his text reaction, the SRC Human Resource Manager wrote: "Mr. Penneh is a private citizen. He does not work for or represent SRC. SRC currently has four employees, general manager, HR Manager, HSE manager and comptroller. Finally, management didn't authorize Mr. Penneh or anyone to act on his [its] behalf".

With his refusal to respond to the second incident in Weala on grounds that he was on leave, it is yet to be understood as to whether Mr. Mensah took his purported leave just hours following his official response to the Kuwah-ta disturbances.

The intrusion into the Kuwah-ta meeting was so irritating according to George, that youths of the town got to the point of almost "throwing the intruders out of the town had it not been for their (team) intervention. We clearly told the young men we didn't want that sort of intervention".

The ARD Chairman said he was taken aback that SRC and agents had taken to the media following their disruption of the village tour on December 18, 2020, to spread falsehood as usual about what obtained in Weala to the effect that they claimed the purpose of the tour was to stall the resumption

of operations of the corporation after earlier causing them to shut down for months.

"According to George, "they (SRC) had written their employees earlier this year stating they were being laid off because of the COVID-19 outbreak for which they were temporarily shutting down the company. How can they say this time around that our activities caused them to shut down"?"

The village tour team to SRC communities included personnel of GA, ARD, Women Natural Resource Platform and Cameroun based international partner Struggle to Economize Future Environment (SEFE), represented by its Executive Director, human rights defender Nasako Besingi.

During the Weala incident, the ARD Chairman said "thugs surrounded their visiting partner and one of their team members – attempting to take away their mobile phones for photographing the incident. Community people had to come to our rescue", George narrated. The operator of a motor bike used by the team was also said to have been severely beaten by the attackers.

At some point during the village tour, George said they were being tailed every inch of the way by company operatives.



### **A polluted water source at SRC**

Paul Larry George: "On the day we visited Kuwah-ta, I decided to disembark our vehicle and commute by motor bike and while passing through Camp 4, a group of men including Penneh who disturbed the meeting in that town,

gathered on the road pointing fingers at me, with some saying they would follow us wherever we went".

Prior to the Weala incident, the ARD Chairman said they had earlier visited Kolleh Dapono-ta in Kpatolee Clan where it was established in the full glare of some company agents that SRC had robbed the community of 100 meters of land after previously promising that they would have left 200 meters of land between the plantation and the periphery of the town.

ARD and GA are among several local and international rights groups pursuing lawsuits in Europe against SRC to account for gross human rights abuses they say the company has committed against indigenous communities whose lands were seized to expand the plantation.

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