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Swedish Human Rights Groups Investigates SRC, LAC Abuses



Monrovia - It appears that the alleged human rights violations being perpetrated against locals by Liberia Agricultural Company (LAC) and Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC), in Grand Bassa and Margibi counties, respectively are not going unnoticed, as foreign human rights groups have begun documenting abuses at the companies.

Liberia Agricultural Company and Salala Rubber Corporation are two sisters company, owned by Swiss based, Socfin Group.

Two human rights organizations, a Swiss based and American registered group have catalogued alleged abuses at the two plantations for a possible lawsuit against the multi million dollars firms.

The two rights groups are Advocates for Community Alternatives and 'Bread for All', based in Switzerland.

Advocates for Community Alternatives, is a group that helps West African communities that

are threatened by the destructive impacts of extractives-led development to take control of their own futures,

Together with the Centre for Public Interest Law in Ghana and Green Advocates in Liberia, ACA has launched the Public Interest Lawyering Initiative for West Africa (PILIWA). PILIWA is a response to the need to inspire and train a movement of lawyers that serve communities and the public interest.

The group has built a network of lawyers and provides support for West African human rights and environmental lawyers.

Silva Lieberherr of Bread for All disclosed that her organization is attracted to the companies due to the alleged reports of human rights abuses being perpetrated by SRC and LAC.

She explained that the two rubber companies are being targeted because their parent company, Socfin Group is based in Switzerland.

Silva disclosed that Socfin Group buys all of the rubbers produced by LAC and SRC.

She said Bread for All work to bring European companies like Socfin Group, involves in alleged human rights violations to book.

She noted that it is bad for European companies to abuse the rights of poor people in Africa and other continents around the globe.

Silva said they are looking into claims of massive land grip, water population, and destruction of crops by SRC and LAC.

Silva who has already been at the plantations described situation there as appalling and disclosed that food security in the areas is deteriorating because residents have no land to farm.

“The situation is very bad people are suffering,” she in an interview.

She said she would write a report that would unmask SRC and LAC and assured that her work will feed into a lawsuit against Socfin Group.

Silva promised to share her work with other rights groups so that pressure can be mounted on Socfin Group.

She noted that Bread for All is working with groups like Green Advocates International and Advocates for Community Alternatives to see how a lawsuit can be instituted against LAC and SRC.

SRC and LAC have reportedly turned down an opportunity to meet and talk with representatives of the two human rights groups.

The groups' wrote the companies asking for a meeting, but SRC and LAC managements said it was not possible.

SRC attempted preventing the rights campaigner access to local communities near its concession in Gibi District when they blocked a gate connecting areas with Weala.

A vehicle carrying the rights groups representatives and local journalists to the communities was stopped at a gate in Masanta Town, near Weala.

The team was traveling to Bondolon Town upon the invitation of residents of the community when they were stopped by SRC security guards, despite getting permission from the company's management.

The company's Human Resource Management, Jallah Mensah permitted and assured the team of unhindered access to the communities, but contrary they were stopped.

"We are not aware that you are to ply this route," a security guard said.

The security guard later allowed the vehicle to pass, when he got Human Resource Manager Mensah on the line following half an hour back and forth negotiation with members of the team who told him that management was aware of their passage.

They were allow access on condition that they be escorted into the communities by a team of SRC security on board a waiting pick-up.

The team headed by Larry Paul George of the Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD) refused.

One security guard justified that the restriction of movement in the area is intended to prevent theft.

He said that the area is SRC concession area and argued that the company has the right stop people from entering its property.

But, Rev. Henry George, a resident of Bondolon Town said the company's action is a complete violation of the constitutional rights, which guarantee free movement.

He disclosed that there are more than ten communities behind the company's concession area and to stop them from traveling to their homes is a grave violation, which needs urgent attention.

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