



## **LIBERIAN CIVIL SOCIETY URGES OIL PALM COMPANIES TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS, RENEGOTIATE THEIR CONTRACTS, AND PROTECT THE LIVELIHOODS OF THE RURAL POOR**

(Monrovia, Liberia, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013) – Three leading Liberian civil society organizations working towards responsible natural resource governance and respect for the rights of rural communities today said that the two largest oil palm concessionaires operating in the country must renegotiate their contracts with the Liberian government. The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU), and the Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev), released a statement calling for a review of Liberia’s agricultural policy, which currently prioritizes the needs of corporate investors over those of rural subsistence farmers. The coalition also urged a halt to all forest clearing for oil palm plantations until the contracts are amended to acknowledge community ownership of land and guarantee their rights are respected.

Malaysian Sime Darby and Indonesian Golden Veroleum hold concessions for over 1.5 million acres of land. Communities inside the concession areas were not informed prior to the signing of the contracts, which have terms of up to 60 years. As “Uncertain Futures,” a report published by the Sustainable Development Institute in August 2012 shows, early stages of Sime Darby’s operations caused severe livelihood disruptions for communities in the area, including decreased access to food sources. Thousands of Liberians have had their land converted to oil palm plantations after being paid extremely low compensation for destroyed crops, and complaints have been filed against both companies to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

“Giving away land for large scale plantations is hailed as promoting the economic recovery of Liberia, but in reality these plantations undermine Liberia’s basic food security and cause poverty when livelihoods are lost. Therefore, allowing them contradicts the Liberian government’s own policies on reducing poverty and preventing hunger,” said Silas Kpanan’Ayoung Siakor, campaigner with the Sustainable Development Institute.

Liberia’s Land Commission has recommended a draft land policy that includes recognition of community land ownership. However, communities located inside existing agricultural concessions – including those of Sime Darby and Golden Veroleum – would not be included in the reform. This oversight ensures that tens of thousands of Liberians will technically remain squatters on their own land. The statement released by SDI, SAMFU, and SESDev urges the government, Sime Darby, and Golden Veroleum to protect the rights of rural farmers by agreeing to bring their concession agreements in line with international human rights principles, and to recognize legal community ownership over land.

“Employment from the plantations is insecure; low paid and does not lead to protecting livelihoods in the long term. Instead, local communities want the Liberian government and the companies involved to recognize their ownership of community land,” said Robert Nyahn, program officer for the Save My Future Foundation.

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