

Rights Groups Strategize To Curb Forest Resources Abuse

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Rights groups across Africa are at a five-day meeting strategizing on how to effectively and collectively fight abuse of forest resources on the continent.

Representatives of several advocacy organizations under the banner of Rights and Resources Group on Monday convened at a regional planning meeting in Monrovia to plan how to jointly address the abuse of forest resources, which has fueled conflicts across Africa.

The opening session of the annual meeting under the auspices of Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)

attracted representatives of several human rights groups from Senegal, Mali, Cameroun, Burkina Faso and Liberia.

Other participants and facilitators are from the United States of America and Europe.

The regional gathering of advocates in Africa is being hosted by the Association of Environmental Lawyers of Liberia or Green Advocates International, the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), Foundation for Community Initiative and IUCN.

RRI's Senior Director for Country and Regional Programs Augusta Molnar told reporters at the start of the meeting that her organization supports local communities and indigenous peoples' struggles against poverty and marginalization by promoting greater global commitment and action towards policy, market and legal reforms that secure their rights to own, control and benefit from natural resources, especially land and forests.

The RRI Senior Director for Country and Regional Programs disclosed that RRI also support communities, governments, donors and international institutions to combine efforts to advance two global goals.

She indicated that RRI combines efforts to substantially increase the forest area under local ownership and administration, with secure rights to conserve, use and trade products and services and to dramatically reduce poverty in the forested areas of the world.

For his part, Green Advocates International Lead Campaigner Alfred L. Brownell disclosed that the theme of the conference is "Putting Communities, Land, the Environment and Natural Resources Rights on the Developmental and Political Agenda".

He said the issue of resources and rights is a major subject around the world.

Cllr. Brownell noted that some of the struggles and conflicts that have erupted recently around the world are all linked to natural resources.

He disclosed that a group of activists, researchers and experts met about five years ago and established a collation to address issues around sources and rights.

He told the opening of the meeting that the large scale allocation of community land by government to concessions without the consent of community members is causing serious problems.

Cllr. Brownell alleged that the government is forcefully taking land from the people without any due process under the Constitution.

“They are taking land that belongs to communities without exercising rights under the Constitution. There is no compensation, no procedure. The Government is just grabbing land,” he alleged.

Cllr. Brownell said inhabitants of communities affected by concessions have rights to resources that come from there.

He said these communities are custodians to land that are affected by concession companies and that they need to be part of the decision on benefit sharing.

“When communities are to benefit from their resources, government must not feel that it is a charity. The people are entitled to their resources,” Cllr. Brownell emphasized.

He added that “this conference would address these issues, which are not unique to Liberia and how we can re-strategize on how to deal with these issues.”