

PRESS STATEMENT

13th September, 2021

Calling on the Government to adhere to the VGGT Principles and uphold Transparency in the implementation of the proposed Chinese funded US\$55m Fish Harbour Project

1. We are following with keen interest Government's intention to establish a fishing port in Sierra Leone with a US\$55m financial support from the Chinese government;
2. We are further aware of several attempts by the Ministry of Fisheries to secure a land size of 252 acres at Black Johnson Village, along the Freetown-Peninsula stretch. It is important to state that large part of the identified land covers the most precious pristine forest and other ecological features which the country relies on for its ecotourism.
3. We have been approached by a group of Sierra Leoneans who own large portion of the said land. They have expressed fear that Government is determined to forcefully take away their land without their Free Prior and Informed Consent as required.
4. So far, we are not aware of any feasibility study carried out by the government in respect of the said project, neither has there been any Environmental Social and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) report disclosed by the government. Thus, we are gravely concerned that, of all the numerous spots available along the coast across the country, the government would choose a non-fishing community and put at risk the only ecotourism site left along the Freetown-Peninsula coast;
5. We are also reminding the Ministry of Fisheries and reiterating our position in two correspondences – one that calls on the Inter-Ministerial Taskforce (which is coordinated by the Ministry of Fisheries) to ensure all necessary precautions are taken to respect the legitimate rights of land owners of Black Johnson, and a second that informs the government of concerns of the artisanal fishermen and stakeholders of Tombo Village – a community acclaimed for fishing - willing to provide such land needed for the facility at relatively low cost to government. These artisanal fishermen and stakeholders of Tombo are concerned that the facility at Black Johnson may turn out to be a white-elephant project. They have expressed that taking the fishing project away from Tombo is equivalent to undermining the socioeconomic, cultural and traditional values of Tombo.
6. Whereas we understand the urgent need for such economically important facility, we are also reminding the government to rollout such project within the ambits of our national laws and in line with the international standards as elaborated in the United Nation's **Voluntary Guidelines for the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry (VGGT)**, to which the government is a signatory.

The Land for Life Consortium comprises of legally registered civil society organizations in Sierra Leone rolling out the multi-actor partnership initiative to promote inclusive land administration in line with the National Land Policy and international standards that support responsible agribusiness investment (RAI) to achieve national food security.

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