



CAMPAIGN FOR JUST MINING-SIERRA LEONE

Press Release

LONDON MINING LEASE AGREEMENT UNDERMINES PRESIDENT KOROMA'S AGENDA FOR CHANGE.

Freetown Monday 10th May, 2010.

The Network Movement for Justice and Development (**NMJD**), the Campaign for Just Mining (**CJM**) and the Association of Journalists on Mining and Extractives (**AJME**) are concerned about the continued silence of **His Excellency President Ernest Bai Koroma** over the cries of citizens of this country in relation to the **Mining Agreement** signed between the Government of Sierra Leone and London Mining Company..

The Mines and Minerals Act 2009 came into being in December, 2009. This momentous Act came as a great beacon light of hope for thousands of Sierra Leoneans especially those in mining communities who have been seared in the flames of natural resource predation and environmental and social injustices. But few months later, a single agreement signed has engulfed that hope.

The recently signed mining lease agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and London Mining Plc still remains an issue of great concern to the civil society, owing to its diversion from the spirit and content of the new Mines and Minerals Act 2009 and other national legislations. The said Agreement was hurriedly passed in parliament and contains over a dozen of flaws ranging from excessive and unwarranted tax concessions to the inclusion of a clause that overrides the Mines and Mineral Act.” **Is this part of the Agenda for Social and Economic Change?**”, asked **Amanita Kelly Lamin, Regional Director- NMJD**.

Civil society working on the extractives therefore remains apprehensive on the following issues:

That the London Mining Lease Agreement is ad variance with the provisions of the Mines and Minerals Act 2009 and that unless the agreement is reviewed in line with the law, it will be deemed dangerous and out rightly exploitative.” Despite the fact that the points raised by the civil society are legitimate and are directed towards the common good, nothing by way of action from the powers that be has been seen taken” says **Theophilus Gbenda, Chairman-AJME**.

London Mining Plc keeps operating under the terms of the dangerous agreement, on the premise of pumping thousands of much needed dollars into the local economy by way of paying royalties and job creation. While civil society has nothing against London Mining Plc, we are however concerned that if the agreement in question is left as it is, it will not only make rubbish of the laws of the land but also undermine President Ernest Bai Koroma’s much drummed about **Agenda for Economic and Social Change**. This is because the portion in the Agenda for Economic and Social Change relating to the mining sector and other natural resources is aimed at maximizing revenue for the economic development of the nation.

Civil society takes great exception to the unfortunate and unrealistic comment often made by the Minister of Mineral Resources and Political Affairs, Alhaji Alpha Kanu, that “Half a loaf is better than none”. Our view is that the phrase ‘half a loaf is better than none’ is only applicable to a situation wherein one goes to beg and expects to receive anything, however little, from a generous giver. As a matter of fact, the agreement is not about half of a loaf, it is about the nation receiving one sixth of our own loaf, against the backdrop of environmental destruction. **“IS THIS BETTER THAN NONE?”** asked **Mohamed Turay- NMJD**. “

Civil society also takes due note of the fact that the Minister of Mineral Resources and Political Affairs, Alhaji Alpha Kanu, is telling the public that a small group of people are bent on undermining the president’s Agenda for Change, we want to underscore this statement by stating categorically

that civil society will also not allow a small group of short-sighted politicians to mortgage the little that is left of our precious mineral wealth for their own selfish gain. This is so because much of it (our mineral wealth) has been depleted and without any benefit to the nation. **“We deserve a FULL LOAF”, says Abu Brima- NMJD.**

We also note with considerable concern that some government officials including the Director of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Mines, Mineral Resources and Political Affairs, **Mr.Karamoko Kabba**, having realized that they are losing popularity on the London Mining Agreement are bent on seeking community sympathy by going down to Lunsar to destroy the reputation of some CSOs by telling them the wrong information about our position in the agreement. **This is according to Hajie Bah, CJM representative at the Lunsar meeting.**

We also take great exception to Honourable Minister Alpha Kanu’s statement of Marampa Mines remaining closed for 35 years as a justification for signing such a bad agreement. We view such a statement as unfortunate. We as civil society thought that we did not lose anything from the Marampa mines when it remained closed for 35years but merely protecting and preserving it from natural resource predators of the **1970-1990** and then from warring factions of the **1990-2002**. Above all, we have also been mining diamonds for eighty years, **WHAT CAN WE SHOW FOR IT TO JUSTIFY LOSING SOMETHING FROM MARAMPA MINES WHEN IT REMAINED CLOSED FOR 35 YEARS.** Now is the time **Mr President** to lift our nation from the quicksand of foreign exploitation to the solid rock of maximizing revenue from our natural resources for the good of present and future generations. “It is but wise that the new APC regime under the dynamic and visionary leadership of **His Excellency President Ernest Bai Koroma**, take appropriate steps to ensure that what the country has preserved as a result of the closure of the mines is regained in record time, and not the other way round”, **says Leslie Mboka,National Chairman-CJM.**

We also demand an explanation from the **Ministry of Finance and Economic Development** for giving such a huge tax concession to a foreign company when various taxes including the newly introduced GST are levied on poor Sierra Leoneans. This is because the Minister of Mineral Resources and Political Affairs has made it clear that granting tax concessions is within the purview of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

While we blame the people’s representatives in the House of Parliament for putting the interest of their constituents behind them during the process of legalizing the said flawed agreement, we also strongly believe that those who facilitated the rushing of the agreement through parliament should be brought to book.

We in the civil society are also very concerned about the current status and operations of the **Strategic Policy Unit** that was charged with the responsibility of reviewing all mining contracts and agreements, and particularly concerned that nothing has been communicated to members of the public by way of update, since the unit was established. We still have not been au fait with the outcome (s) of the contract (s) reviewed so far. We also want to know what role the Unit played in the formulation of the controversial London Mining Lease Agreement. We also demand an explanation on the status of **the Presidential Task Force** that was tasked with the responsibility of making recommendations to the Strategic Policy Unit.

Civil society will there continue to maintain and sustain our legitimate discontent and dramatize a shameful situation over the London Mining Agreement until there is an **ATITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE** in signing bad mining agreements for this country.

We end this press release with a wakeup call on **His Excellency President Ernest Bai Koroma** and his government to act prudently by warranting the immediate reviewing of the infamous London Mining Lease Agreement so as to make it a win-win and not a win-lose situation as it is right now.

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