

HRCSL Investigates Stalemate Between Mining Companies & Staff and Community People



The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) conducted a fact-finding mission from 19- 21 March 2025, in the Mosavie Community in Mattru Jong, Bonthe District and Tongo Field, Kenema District, to investigate the stalemate between FOISON Mining Company in Mosavie Community in Mattru Jong and Sierra Diamonds Mining Company and staff in Tongo Field.

The team from the Commission, led by the Vice Chairperson, Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq, upon arrival in Mattru, first engaged the Paramount Chief (PC), Alhaji AB Sheriff and his council of chiefs as the local leaders to hear their perspective on the stalemate between the community

and the company. The PC disclosed that FOISON took over Sierra Rutile just over 7 months ago and had offered to give as a gesture to the community the sum of NLe500,000 to construct a health centre even before the company could start operations. He added that the community made other requests, including a road, a water well, a school, and electricity.

According to him, the brawl, which went viral on social media, occurred after some community members decided against his advice to use the Poro Society to scare off the Chinese people at the company site and then attacked the company, stealing huge sums of money and some company property. The police had to come in to restore calm and make some arrests, the Paramount Chief concluded.

In a mini public hearing at the Mosavie community of over 200 people, including the town chief, women's leader, the youth leader, representatives of landowning families, etc. The people, led by their town chief, said they reached out to the FOISON company to remind them of their requests, which have not been fulfilled by the company and that the community remains deprived, especially with the unavailability of drinking water.

They further revealed that their land was first taken and utilised by Sierra Rutile for 27 years without any development or compensation to the people, and that now FOISON has taken over the same land with signs of the same underdevelopment as the last 27 years under Sierra Rutile.

In Bo, the team engaged the resident judge, Justice Francis Banks Kamara, J., and the Magistrate, Landonet Macauley, to explore the possibility of admitting to bail the accused persons, who had already spent about a month in police custody before being charged in court. Among the 26 people arrested were three juveniles who, upon the request of the Commission, were moved to the Bo Remand Home. The trial of the 23 others is still ongoing at the Bo High Court, with the Commission closely monitoring.

On Thursday, 10th April, 2025, HRCSL engaged top management, including the General Manager and Legal Retainer/Representative of FOISON Mining Company, to present findings from the fact-finding mission. In their response, the General Manager, Joseph Nanah and Legal

Retainer, M.B.S Kamara, refuted all the claims made by the community, but however committed to finding an amicable settlement.

A protest by mine workers of the Sierra Diamonds Mining Company in front of the company's premises in Tongo Field, Kenema district, was also circulated on social media, where workers were demanding backlogged salaries and other emoluments.

Upon arrival in Tongo, the team first engaged together traditional leaders, landowners, Civil Society members and ordinary community people in the town's "court barray", creating an opportunity for all in attendance to provide a good background to the issue and express their concerns and grievances.

The chiefs informed the Commission that Sierra Diamonds started mining operations in their community in 2018 and that since then, six (6) communities have been affected by their operations, namely: Kpandubu, Bumpeh, Nguakoma, Mavehun, Sandeyeima, and Torkpombu. They narrated that the people in these communities have had to desert their homes due to frequent blasting by the company, causing serious damage to their homes in addition to the deprivation of their right to use their lands for farming and other agricultural purposes. They emphasised that there has never been any compensation for the deprivation of the use of their land and their homes, save that they give them SLLe80 (equivalent to about US\$4) per household each time they conduct blasting.

Speaking on behalf of Civil Society, Umu Ndanema Sesay working for Women in Mining and Extractive (WOME), said mining activities of Sierra Diamonds have led to the contamination of their water source, a source to which they no longer have access to and that the only source of drinking water now is from a stream running in the cemetery. She disclosed that the company usually digs pits in the communities during their mining operations and leave them open even when they are not working on them thereby serving as death traps particularly for children to the extent that two (2) children have fallen into them and died including the child of one of the mine workers of them company.

These deaths, she added, have both gone without any form of accountability or compensation. She further stated that they observe that diseases which hitherto were not encountered by the

community people have now surfaced in the community. She made specific reference to elephantiasis and river blindness as the notable diseases that the community have had to put up with. She concluded that they have had several engagements with the Paramount Chief and the Management of the company in a bid to address these issues, but nothing has come out of those engagements. She noted that the Member of Parliament (MP) does not come to see them, so there is no contact with their MP.

The team then proceeded to the premises of the company, where it engaged over sixty (60) employees who narrated their concerns and disappointments with their employer, Sierra Diamonds.

They disclosed that they have gone for ten (10) months without salary and that Management has abandoned them and gone to stay in Freetown, while others have left the country. The employees raised several other human rights concerns including deplorable conditions of service, unsafe working environment, poor sanitation and lack of pure drinking water facilities, grave disparities in pay between local employees and their foreign counterparts even where the job description or terms of reference may be the same, non-payment of NASSIT contributions, poor medical insurance etc.

One of the staffs narrated the death of his child in one of the company's pits without compensation while another brought forward his about 6 years old sick child who had gone through major surgery and in need of urgent medical care yet his father cannot afford the cost and fears that he may lose his child since he could not get his salary to take care of his child.

In Freetown, the Commission met with Senior Management of the company at the Commission's office, who acknowledged the concerns of the workers and promised to resolve, especially payments of salaries, immediately, while working on the other concerns raised.

HRCSL has engaged key stakeholders, including government institutions, on a roadmap to resolving issues that normally emanate in the mining industry in Sierra Leone.