



Press Release

Kimberlite Diamond Mining and Gross Human Rights Abuses in Kono; What Hope for Prosperity?

The Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), Medico International - Germany, the Campaign for Just Mining (CJM) and the Association of Journalists on Mining and Extractives (AJME), having carefully and critically studied and analyzed the riot that broke out in Koidu City, Kono District, on December 17-18 2012, now wish to make our position known on the unfortunate incident that left two people dead, several others sustaining serious gunshot wounds and at the same time plunging the entire Koidu City into a state of emergency and panic.

From our findings, it came out clearly that the whole episode started when aggrieved workers of OCTEA Mining, formerly known as Koidu Holdings Limited (KHL), staged a peaceful protest action to demonstrate their frustration and dissatisfaction over poor working conditions and corporate deceit.

The atmosphere that was borne out of the protest action was tense, which explains the reason why it easily degenerated into an all out running battle between the aggrieved workers and the armed police guards stationed at the OCTEA Mining concession.

In our view, there was a complete mismanagement of the situation by the police who in line with community policing had the obligation of calming down the protesters without necessarily resorting to the firing of tear gas canisters and live ammunition. The riot suddenly spread across the entire Koidu City, thereby warranting the imposition of a curfew order that lasted three days.

The fact that the two persons killed and the majority of those who sustained gunshot wounds had nothing absolutely to do with the protest action and the fact that military reinforcement had to be called in, is in itself an indication that the police to a large extent were not able to manage the situation.

With keen concern, it is noted that the both government delegations i.e. the one led by the Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources, Mr. Minkialu Mansaray and the other led by His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Alhaji Sahr Samuel Sumana, dispatched to Kono to address the situation, made it their utmost priority to go straight to the OCTEA Mining concession rather than going first to the community and aggrieved workers to enquire about what led to the protest.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Minkialu Mansaray's delegation went onboard the official vehicles of OCTEA Mining to address the aggrieved workers outside the company's concession, which questions their neutrality in handling the situation which made the workers become even more aggrieved and the protest action taking another dimension.

Also of a greater concern was the manner in which the Vice President Samuel Sumana approached the issue. Rather than addressing the root causes, the Vice President blanketly blamed the protesters for what he referred to as taking the law into their hands and therefore ordered all present at a meeting summoned to address the aggrieved workers and community residents to sit down on the ground as a way of demonstrating his anger at them for disrupting the operations of the company.

By asking the people to sit on the ground and threatening to “smash” anyone who dares to go against his word, Vice President Samuel Sumana was consciously reechoing the fact that the communities are totally powerless and that they stand the risk of being manhandled or even killed anytime they attempt to stage another strike action against the company.

This by all indications amounts to the criminalization of protest, blatant abuse of the rights and disrespect for the Kono people by Vice President Samuel Sumana who happens to be an indigene of Kono District and whose maintenance in office by President Ernest Bai Koroma is not unconnected to the overwhelming support given him by the very Kono People.

We note with utter surprise that the killings that occurred during the riot did not attract any condemnation from Vice President Samuel Sumana in particular and the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) as a whole, especially so when those killed were neither part of the protesters nor employees of OCTEA Mining.

As stated by Anne Jung of Medico International and one of the funding members of the international campaign against conflict diamonds, "President Koroma's government responded to these shocking events without empathy or concern for the improvement of the unacceptable situation in the mines. In Koidu, the issue of conflict diamonds shifted into diamond conflicts".

OCTEA Mining, a company that is perceived by many as a model insofar as the terms of its mining contract as compared to others is concerned, is expected to behave in a socially responsible manner *and stay away from controversies that would eventually lead to deaths as was the case in December 2007 when two Kono youths were killed in cold blood by the police over a protest by affected property owners in relation to the company's poor commitment to their relocation and compensation issues.*

Abu Brima, Executive Director of the Network Movement for Justice and Development says *"OCTEA Mining has all what it takes to avoid a situation wherein its employees will embark on a strike action over poor conditions of service and heartless mistreatments".*

We firmly believe that had *the recommendations of the Jenkins Johnston Commission of Inquiry Report fully implemented*, OCTEA Mining would have taken seriously issues relating to the welfare of community residents that are directly affected by its operations and of course its local employees.

Koidu is only one example. Elsewhere, environmental damage by rutile mining or the expropriation of huge areas of land for growing bio-fuel crops for export also bear witness to an economic and social policy that is fuelling conflicts instead of solving problems.

"We know that lasting peace in Sierra Leone is possible only if wealth is distributed more fairly and the right to a decent life exists on more than just paper. Without that, the future holds more mass poverty and renewed violence", says Anne Jung, Public Outreach Department of Medico International.

In view of the foregoing, we call for the ***immediate setting up of an independent commission*** of inquiry into the riot under the spotlight, so as to clearly establish what went wrong and ascertain whether the Vice President's handling of the situation by asking aggrieved citizens to sit down on the bare ground in their moment of grief was responsible and dignified and find out why the company continue to behave in the fashion of a king in the jungle.

About the organizations

Medico International is one of the funding members of the international campaign to ban landmines globally. The organization was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. Medico has supported NMJD since 2006. Contact Person: Anne Jung - jung@medico.de

Network Movement for Justice and Development is a national non-governmental organisation working for a just and self-reliant Sierra Leone where women, men, youths, persons with disabilities, children and communities are conscientized and live in dignity without fear and discrimination especially on grounds of sex, faith, socio-economic and political status. Contact Persons: Abu Brima, Executive Director - abrima@nmjd.org +232 76 645314 or Aminata Kelly-Lamin: akelly-lamin@nmjd.org +232 76 651 755.

Association of Journalists on Mining and Extractives is a just mining media advocacy group that has as its main objective *'Using the media as a tool for sensitizing the public on the mining and extractive industry with a view to effecting required changes in the industry for the benefit of all Sierra Leoneans and more especially the host communities directly affected by the activities of the actors in the industry.* Contact Person: Theophilus Sahr Gbenda, Chairman - theophilus.culture@gmail.com 232 76 982 623

Campaign for Just Mining is a platform of organizations calling for judicious mining of mineral resources in Sierra Leone. Contact Person: Leslie M'boka - National Chairman - lesliembokacadem@yahoo.com 232 33 752171.