



PRESS STATEMENT FROM SOCFIN

The management of Socfin Agricultural Company Sierra Leone wishes to inform the public on the events which took place over the last few weeks on the Socfin plantation and surrounding areas in the Malen Chiefdom in Pujehun District.

On Wednesday 16th January 2019 the Company's Agricultural Department closed down just after the arrival of the Member of Parliament for constituency 104 due to no workers turning up for work. Workers informed management that they would not come to work due to the intimidation from gangs of youths, many fueled with drugs and which many were not from this Chiefdom. These gangs were planning to invoke the secret society in various parts of Malen without the authorization of the Paramount Chief. Havoc and chaos pursued over the following days and during all this period mass organized fruit theft continued and many areas of the plantation were no go zones even for the police.

On Sunday 20th January the Resident Minister came to Sahn Malen to look into the elevated issue of a dispute on a plot of land in Sahn town, which the Member of Parliament wanted to build a constituency building on his private land. The Minister's visit was a result of the tension that had escalated to such a high level and required his intervention. The Resident Minister also met with the General Manager of Socfin on the same day to inform him of the situation around the secret society gatherings and dispute on this plot of land and informed him that additional protection will be provided due to the situation.

The Resident Minister then went to the community radio two times and made an address to the public on these issues. That night information came in that the secret society was coming out illegally and panic around the town and chiefdom started with many people fleeing and later that night military and police were deployed; including to

areas of strategic importance to Socfin. On Monday 21st January chaos ensued over the illegal and misuse of the secret society which has revealed after investigations that a large number of illegal processing mills are placed within the secret society bushes.

By the afternoon a huge gang of youths attacked the military and police stationed at the Socfin installation at Jao Junction in upper Malen, which is encompassed and protected by a strong fence with gates. The attacking gang pushed and damaged a section of fence, broke all window of the office complex from stones and other objects being thrown and set fire to the security post within the installation.

As a result of this unfortunate incident two people died and one member of the police was seriously wounded from being shot at from within the gang attacking the installation. The injured policeman was conveyed to Bo hospital using the Socfin ambulance stationed at the medical clinic in Sahn town. On the same day a statement from the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development issued an instruction to all Resident Ministers nationwide making an immediate ban on initiation by secret societies.

Socfin has now started to resume operations however are concerned these issues do not repeat themselves and that these gangs in weeks prior to this incident who were intimidating workers, resisting and blockading police movements, having organized operations stealing and processing fruit and taking out hundreds of 20 liter containers (batas) of palm oil each day are stopped. In Liberia, just across from Bo Waterside, the oil palm plantation called Sime Darby similar in size and started at the same time as Socfin has announced it is closing due to rampant and uncontrolled fruit theft.

In an emergency meeting held by the Socfin Country Director last week, closure of the Socfin operation in Sierra Leone was debated and was to be carried out within weeks if no concrete solution to the mass organized theft and stopping of organized incited criminal gangs had not been addressed.

The management of Socfin want to thank his Excellency, President Maada Bio, his Government and the law enforcing organizations for stepping in and restoring law and order and look forward to a peaceful path ahead to allow Socfin to continue to grow and contribute to the development of Malen and the country, creating employment, revenue generation from taxes and precious hard currency earnings through exports.