



THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

HRCSL INVESTIGATES KOIDU LTD. MINING STANDOFF

On Thursday 13th and Friday 14th March, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone in collaboration with the Kono District Human Rights Committee, embarked on a fact-finding mission with the objective to investigate and get first-hand information from key authorities on the ground regarding the standoff between Koidu Limited Mining Company and employees.



HRCSL as per its functions, is required to collaborate with other partners intervening in the field of human rights and also investigate and report in writing on any issue that has the potential to affect the enjoyment of human rights. In recent weeks, the Commission observed through its media monitoring, incidents of sit-down strike actions by mines Workers of Koidu Limited Mining Company in Kono District demanding better conditions of service.

The joint investigation team constituting the HRCSL and members of the KDHRC was led by the Commission's Chairperson Patricia Narsu Ndanema and accompanied by the Director of Business and Human Rights and Labour Relations, Mr. Abdulai Yollah Bangura, Director of Human Resources, Peter



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Abraham Koroma, Senior Human Rights Officer, Ibrahim Tarawallie and Human Rights Officer, Elvis Mambu (East Regional Office Branch).



In the absence of the Paramount Chief, engagements were held with the Senior Section Chief of Tankoro Chiefdom, Sahr Mboma, members of the Kono District Human Rights Committee, cross-section of executive members of the aggrieved Workers Union, the Sierra Leone Police, Chairman of the Council of Paramount Chiefs in Kono, Edward Sahr Mbawa and the Senior Management of Koidu Limited Mining Company.

The Secretary General of the Workers Union, Sulaiman Mansaray, catalogued a series of claims highlighting but not limited to the lack of risk allowances with focus on those working in the mines, discriminatory practices citing the rights to clean and safe drinking water, poor sanitary conditions for black workers, unlawful dismissal of workers without due process, no overtime payment and fraudulent salary structures. They informed the team that this justifies why they had to lay down their tools until the issues at hand are resolved.

Following the issues raised by representatives of the executive of the aggrieved workers, the Chairperson of HRCSL, Mrs. Patricia Narsu Ndanema noted the



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claims and informed the representatives that the HRCSL and its partners, the KDHRC were on a fact finding mission and has to engage other authorities concerned to corroborate the information provided by the executive.



The Investigation Team engaged the General Manager and other top management personnel of the Company to seek clarifications on issues raised by the worker's union, bordering on their human rights to work and subsequently their general welfare.

In his response, the General Manager, Rocco Vermuelen, refuted some of the allegations made by the workers, noting that the strained relationship between both parties began no sooner the workers elected a new executive of their union having verbally withdrawn from United Mine workers Union (UMU) being the umbrella body to which the workers belong. He further added that the actions of the workers do not fall in line with the provisions in the Industrial Labour Laws and thus considered it illegal.

He informed the team that the Company remains open to have discussions on the way forward in anticipation for an amicable settlement. He added that as a



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company, they are not against the enjoyment of the rights of any worker but added that people must claim their rights through legitimate means.

He also mentioned interventions of the First Lady, ongoing discussions between the company's board and the Minister of Labour, Mohamed Rahman Swaray, to find a common ground in resolving the issue at hand.



He, however, highlighted steps already taken by the company to address some of the demands by workers including the procurement of mobile toilets to improve the hygiene situation in the mines.

He expressed his delight over the Commission's visit and that of the KDHRC and anticipated that their involvement will find a lasting solution to the current standoff.

A very detailed report on this investigation will soon be published.

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