

Gbapa Consensus

**Decisions at the 5th Bi-Annual National Meeting of
the Heads of Member Organizations of the Alliance
for Rural Democracy (ARD)**

Gbapa, Nimba
(13-15 December 2013)

Theme:

“Protecting customary land rights as an empowerment for poor and vulnerable
communities in Liberia”

Alliance for Rural Democracy 

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5th Bi-annual Meeting of the Alliance for Rural Democracy
(December 15, 2013)

Whereas, we gathered in Gbapa, Nimba County, from 13-15 December 2013, for the 5th Bi-Annual Meeting of the Heads of Member Organizations, Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD);

Thankful to the peace-loving people of Gbapa Town, the Nimba Advocates for the Environment, Economic Empowerment and Natural Resources Rights (NAEERR) for facilitating the 5th Bi-Annual Meeting of the Alliance for Rural Democracy including turning over their homes, meeting hall, kitchens (to accommodate the delegates) and for deploying the entire community to lead the mobilization efforts, the preparation of food and heating of water for the delegates;

Greatly Motivated to build on the consensus and progress made at previous ARD Bi-Annual Meetings including achieving the full and effective implementation of the forward-looking Strategies for the advancement of the Alliance and Liberia in the Zwedru Protocol, Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, in November 2010; in the Gbezhohn Declaration, Buchanan, Grand Bassa County in May 2011 and in the Kon Town Decision, Grand Cape Mount County, in September 2012;

Deeply saddened by the devastating impact of climate change on the lives of ordinary farmers across Liberia including the dying of crops, the abandonment of farms due to heavy rainfall, the reduction of fallow system due to scarcity of farmlands, the pains associated with crop rotation or choices of crops to plant due to abrupt shift in weather patterns, the change of diet for many community members and how these traditional experiences have never informed national planning on climate change mitigation and adaption;

Ashamed that despite years of persistent public outcry, the 53rd National Legislature, through the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Honorable Alex Tyler, has finally admitted that Liberians in rural parts of the country are not feeling the impact of the national Government in terms of public service delivery;

Noting the progressive outlook of the Draft Petroleum Law of Liberia with considerations for “citizen participation”, “beneficial ownership” and the local ownership requirement but remaining fearful that in the absence of adequate public consultations and safeguards these provisions could be breeding grounds for future controversies overflow of petroleum revenues



and corruption when benefits are concentrated in the hands of an elite few at the expense of the general population;

Deeply troubled by the lack of conducive working and living environment across several of the mining, logging and agricultural concessions including the lack of safety gears, discrimination in available treatment for workers performing the same task, unexplained reports of death among workers, the use of tractors to transport workers and living quarters that violate standards for health and sanitation in housing in Liberia;

Mindful of the voices of all historically, under-represented communities including women everywhere and in particular women managing small-medium enterprises (SMEs) such as charcoal production, back-yard gardens, rock-crushing and mining;

Disappointed that in sectors where women employment is possible such as the agricultural concessions, etc., the approach has never considered that many indigenous peoples assign different job titles, such as feminine and masculine, to the extraction of different natural resources—aged, breast-feeding, recovery from surgery where manual labor has been suspended until recuperation is successful, etc;

Greatly Concerned about the brewing tension arising from the boundary dispute between Bomi and Gbarpolu Counties and the delays in undertaking further investigations (as may be necessary) to address all and additional concerns of the parties or the implementation of the recommendations from the existing report prepared by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Administrative Boundaries in 2011;

Ashamed that slum and squatter communities are finding it difficult to own property or prove their legal status in urban centers across Liberia as they lack the requisite papers and that without efforts by the Liberian state to help them secure property rights, they risk being completely driven from the cities or forced to leave their shelters at any time and without any serious compensation;

Disappointed that in the name of development (mainly based on individual investments in business houses) slum and squatter communities are experiencing increased threats, raids, demolitions and displacement from policy makers who took oath to protect them and that this one-sided approach has led to the loss of valuable properties including historic sites and learning centers with common roots to the under-privileged;

Further disappointed that slum and squatter communities, in Monrovia and across Liberia, remain excluded from city planning and basic social services despite their valuable but unnoticed contributions to the day-to-day activities in cities (as drivers, marketers, mechanics, tailors, cooks, fishermen, masons, plumbers, carpenters, etc) and that instead of driving them from the cities, the Government of Liberia should shift her stance and seek lasting but beneficial solutions for these communities with their clear support;

Embarrassed that in the name of economic recovery and despite sound counsel, the Government of Liberia has not been able to prudentially aware community-based natural resources (to multinational corporations) in manners as to conserve the environment and natural resources of Liberia equitably both for the present and future generations, taking into account the rate of population growth and productivity of available resources, and in order to bequeath of future generations a natural resource patrimony that is in as good a condition as is feasible;



Embarrassed also that commercial and governmental land acquisitions are proceeding faster than progress on formalizing the customary and legitimate rights of vulnerable communities to land in Liberia and that this increased demand for land and natural resources threatens to reshape local landscapes, ecosystems, and livelihoods without considering how it fundamentally jeopardizes the communities that depend on these lands;

Aware that in areas awarded for mining, agriculture and logging concessions, the process of internal immigration and re-settlement poses difficult challenges for long-term resident communities, newly immigrant groups and the organizations working to support land and natural resource rights and management at local level and that there is a lack of innovative initiatives for helping these communities equitably, peacefully and adaptively secure and sustainably manage their land and natural resources;

Aware also of the need to adopt and apply engagement and consultation processes that ensure the meaningful participation of indigenous communities in decision making over community-based natural resources, through a process that is consistent with their traditional decision-making processes and is based on good faith negotiation;

Concerned about the urgent need to address the challenges facing community rights including the violation of the Community Rights Law (CRL) by the CRL Regulation and that some provisions of the Regulation are inconsistent and in violation of the mandate of the CRL;

Lamenting that although health is increasingly recognized in both national and international law to be a legally enforceable right, the health of the rural poor and marginalized people of Liberia is under daily threat or deteriorating and that many poor people die unnecessarily every year from inadequate health care, lack of essential drugs and inaccessibility of available health posts;

Emphasizing that health is a fundamental human right and that the people of Liberia (especially vulnerable communities) have a right to demand to live in conditions that are health-promoting and to have genuine access to affordable, adequate health care services to both treat and prevent illnesses and protect health. The meeting agreed that good health for all (irrespective of status and location) should be recognized, promoted and protected as an essential ingredient for human development, for equity and for justice in the new Liberia;

Determined to advance the human rights of member organizations of the ARD and the people of Liberia, nationally and internationally, by listening to, amplifying and communicating their voices to a wider audience, and by standing with them in persuading public and political opinion of the need for an end to all human rights violations;

Impressed by the unrelenting efforts and solemn pledge of the membership of the ARD, at the 5th Bi-Annual Meeting, to the promotion and protection of Economic, social and cultural rights and the adoption of the slogan “Touch-One-Touch-All” as a firm commitment to solidarity action across Liberia;

Dedicating ourselves unreservedly to addressing all constraints and obstacles and thus enhancing further the advancement and empowerment of vulnerable and under-represented communities across Liberia, and agree that this requires urgent action in the usual spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity, now and to carry us forward into the next Bi-Annual Meeting; and



Now therefore, after three (3) days of interactive discussions, we hereby adopt the following decisions:

DECISION ONE (1)

AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION OF LIBERIA TO RECOGNIZE AND PROTECT CUSTOMARY LAND RIGHTS

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling the urgent need to work with the relevant stakeholders to address the threats posed to land ownership and property rights;

Noting that the lack of recognition of customary land rights is a serious barrier to community empowerment and benefit-sharing throughout Liberia

Decides to:

1. Consult widely in Liberia and abroad to convene a Referendum to amend the Constitution of Liberia to recognize and protect Customary land rights;
2. Form the prepositions informing the referendum;
3. Take advantage of the ongoing public consultations to review the Constitution of Liberia Law; and
4. Closely follow the draft Land Law in Liberia and include recognition of customary land rights.

DECISION TWO (2)

OBSERVER STATUS AND ADMISSION OF NEW MEMBERS

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling that at the 3rd Bi-Annual Meeting in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, agreed that Observer Status will be granted new applicants at the meeting except that their participation will be restricted to “Observers” with no voting rights;

Recalling that the Buchanan meeting further mandated the Steering Committee, ARD, to organize verification visits to new applicants and to recommend their admission as a member of the Alliance;

Noting that two of the traditional county-based members of the ARD, United Family for Reconciliation (UFAR), Grand Gedeh County, and the Center for Development Initiative, Gbarpolu County, have been replaced by new institutions, Grand Gedeh Advocates for Community Rights (GGACR) and True Advocates of Gbarpolu Resource Rights (TAGRR), due to poor performances;

Decides to:

1. Formally grant membership to the Village Development Fund (VDF) after said membership decision (to confer membership) was suspended due to the absence of VDF at the Bi-Annual Meeting in Kon Town, Grand Cape Mount County, due to last minute difficulties and;



2. Formally grant membership to the Project Affected Communities (PAC), Sime Darby, Grand Cape Mount County, which submitted application for membership in Kon Town, Grand Cape Mount County;
3. Recognize Grand Gedeh Advocates for Community Rights (GGACR), of Grand Gedeh County, and the True Advocates of Gbarpolu Resource Rights (TAGRR), of Gbarpolu County, as members of the ARD and to treat them not as entirely new members but as members that experienced change-of names;
4. Grant Observer Status to the following new applicants and to mandate the Steering Committee, ARD, to organize verification visits (to these new applicants) consistent with the membership procedures:
 - a) WAAC-Affected Communities, Wangekor, Grand Cape Mount; Project Affected Communities (PAC)-Workers, Sime Darby, Grand Cape Mount County; Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC)-Affected Communities, Margibi County; Buchanan Renewables (BR)- Affected Workers, Grand Bassa County; Liberia Agricultural Company (LAC)-Affected Communities, Grand Bassa County; China Union-Affected Workers, Bong Mines, Bong Mines, Bong County; Golden Veroleum-Affected Communities (AL-BLOTEH), Sinoe County; Citizens Advocacy for Resource Equitable Distribution (CARED-Liberia), Ganta, Nimba County; Grassroots Members, Firestone Agriculture Workers Union (FAWUL), Firestone Margibi County; Salary Association, Firestone Agriculture Workers Union (FAWUL), Firestone
5. Receive the Steering Committee’s verification report, at the next Bi-Annual meeting, advising the Plenary on the admission of new applicants in Count 4 of this decision.

DECISION THREE (3)

COMMUNICATION OFFER BY GREEN ADVOCATES INTERNATIONAL

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling the financial and bureaucratic difficulties faced by the membership of ARD in disseminating information and challenges through the print and electronic media in Liberia;

Recalling that Green Advocates International has already established its own newspaper, *The Activist*, to serve as the “Voice of the Voiceless” and the medium for free expression of concerns affecting the poor and under-represented communities and peoples; and

Noting that Green Advocates International has extended invitation to the ARD—the Steering Committee and the entire membership—free access to all communication services at Green Advocates International:

Decides to:



1. Take advantage of the communication services at Green Advocates International by contacting its Media Advocates to arrange newspaper publications and special press coverage, free of charge;
2. Encourage the membership to leave enough time for proper planning of special news coverage while encouraging the publication of news as they occur;
3. Ensure wider circulation of the **Activist Newspaper** by liaising with the Sales Department of the Activist to ensure the speedy delivery of the *Activist Newspaper* in each county;
4. Approach the Sales Department of the *Activist Newspaper* to consider compensation for community partners helping to disseminate *the Activist*.

DECISION FOUR (4)

CALLS TO DISBURSE COMMUNITY BENEFITS IN THE FORESTRY SECTOR

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling that past logging operations in Liberia never really benefited local communities or allowed them to be part of the decision-making process as it relates to the management of their community-based natural resources;

Recalling that the 2006 National Forestry Reform Law mandates the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) to ensure that a sum equal to 30% of all land Rental fees collected is distributed to Affected Communities through the National Benefit sharing Trust Board;

Recalling that since the establishment of the National Benefit Sharing Trust Board, it has not received any funds from the Ministry of Finance on behalf of the various forest affected communities in Liberia; and

Noting that since October 2012, actual payment of land rental fees is US\$1,115,338.00 and that this amount is yet to be disbursed despite the serious financial constraints facing the affected communities.

Decides to:

1. Campaign for the unconditional disbursement of land rental fees withheld by the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Finance;
2. As of this Meeting, consult widely with the forest affected communities and the membership of ARD to design and implement appropriate strategies leading to the immediate disbursement of all land rental fees being withheld by the Government of Liberia;
3. Appoint a five-member Working Group comprising the affected communities, the Steering Committee and the Secretariat to lead the design and implementation of the Alliance's strategy promised in Count 2 of this Decision;



4. Ensure that the Committee is able to work with all Private Use Permits (PUPs) Concession communities tracking the number of harvested logs in various localities;
5. Investigate the circumstances behind the delays in disbursing all land rental fees in manners as shall ensure deterrence against future occurrences.

DECISION FIVE (5)

INTRODUCING IDENTITY (ID) CARDS FOR THE MEMBERSHIP

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling that Plenary at the 3rd and 4th Bi-Annual meetings of the ARD agreed on some of identify card for the membership and then invited the Steering Committee to advice on the best approaches in doing so;

Recalling that the Steering Committee presented draft Indentify Cards which were endorsed by Plenary in Kon Town, Grand Cape Mount County, except that technical details in terms of the extent of dissemination, fee per card, recipients were not fully discussed;

Recalling the increased demands for some form of Identity Card among the membership of ARD; and

Noting that new arguments have emerged that when Identity (ID) Cards are issued, the bearers of these ID Cards are going to consider the move as a form of employment and will, thus, press for financial compensation which may not be affordable by member organizations.

Decides to:

1. Issue ID Cards to all members for a duration of two years at the cost of US\$5.00;
2. The Steering Committee and the Secretariat will work with the Heads of Member organizations of ARD on the number of ID Cards to be used per institution

DECISION SIX (6)

NEED FOR POLICY ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN LIBERIA

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling that the environment serves the national, economic, social, cultural and spiritual needs of Liberia and its people and that the Government of Liberia should ensure the sustainable or wise use of the natural resources in pursuance of social and economic development within undermining the ecosystem's renewal and re-supply process;

Recalling that Bush fallow practices or shifting cultivation is facing extinction and needs renewed attention by some policy makers who continue blame our method of farming mainly for climate change in Liberia;

Recalling that Traditional knowledge has influenced and continues to influence the management and conservation of forest ecosystems in rural Liberia through the institution of taboos, bye-laws, sanctions and scared sites.



Noting that erratic rainfall caused by climate change is already affecting the farming season by preventing the burning of farms as well as reducing the quantity and quality of crop harvest or production.

Decides to:

1. Lobby with the Government of Liberia and other relevant stakeholders to adopt policies on climate change;
2. Encourage the Government of Liberia to help end the debates over the drivers of deforestation by commissioning a comprehensive study on all land use practices but with emphasis on bush fallow or shifting cultivation and large-scale agriculture such as palm oil and rubber;
3. Ensure the removal of carbon rights granted in existing concessions such as agricultural or oil palm concessions granted Sime Darby and Golden Veroleum

DECISION SEVEN (7)

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES AT THE ALLIANCE FOR RURAL DEMOCRACY (ARD)

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling that the Natural Resources Women Platform represents the voices of women at the ARD;

Recalling that the current mining, forestry and agricultural concessions granted by the Government of Liberia have failed to recognize the economic, social and cultural rights of indigenous forest communities including, in some places, restriction on access to fertile lands, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and protein sources such as fish, meat and that such unchecked restrictions have the potential to adversely affect the quality and quantity of food production;

Decides to:

1. Ensure that the Natural Resource Women Platform meets regularly and not only once a year when ARD is having her Bi-Annual Meeting;
2. The extent of available resources, provide two to three (3) slots in each county for the Women Platform to bring other women to learn about the platform and educate others;
3. Do follow-ups where the members of the Platform are residing so that additional women who have been approached, can believe and see that the Platform is being backed by other organizations

DECISION EIGHT (8)

THE NEED TO ADOPT A POSITION ON THE DRAFT PETROLEUM ACT OF LIBERIA

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),



Recalling that Liberia has vast natural resources but is at the same time very poor;

Recalling that despite some achievements to date, Liberian civil society is still deeply convinced that the task of transforming the *culture* of natural resources administration and governance into a more accountable and democratic one remains a serious challenge;

Recalling that Liberia's natural resources are still, for the main part, a curse in the sense that they are not benefiting the citizenry and that citizens are generally aware of the possibilities and problems, and expectations have risen for change, but citizens are able to discern little beyond the rhetoric of reform;

Noting that Liberia is currently holding consultations (led by members of the 53rd National Legislature, Republic of Liberia) on the draft Petroleum Act and that the impact of these consultations is yet to be fully felt among ordinary community members in rural Liberia; and

Thankful for the positive provisions in the Draft Petroleum Act on “citizen participation”, “beneficial ownership” and the local ownership including greater accountability of state actors and flow of petroleum revenues;

Decides to:

1. Ensure the full and informed participation of all Liberians in the consultations around the Draft Petroleum Act;
2. Create awareness among the membership of ARD through training opportunities on the Draft Petroleum Act including simplification of the Draft Petroleum Act; and
3. Form a position on what to include in the Draft Petroleum Act in manners as to ensure adequate public consultations and safeguards on the provisions for “citizen participation”, “beneficial ownership”, and local ownership requirement as a way of addressing future controversies over flow of revenues; enforcement challenges (for Liberians) such as the financial and technical qualifications necessary to carry out costly and complex exploration and development activities and corruption when benefits(at the local level) are concentrated in the hands of an elite few at the expense of the general population

DECISION Nine (9)

THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT THE SPECIAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXPERIENCING SHARING ON ECONOMIC SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS IN LIBERIA

The Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD),

Recalling that at each Bi-Annual Meeting, the experience sharing session has created the opportunity to assess the performance levels of community members, local leaders and the Liberian Government of Liberia on established human rights standards and/or in relations to economic, social and cultural rights in the new Liberia;

Recalling that the heart-touching experiences shared at the 5th Bi-Annual meeting, the mixed feelings they created among the participants and the extent of work still lying ahead in the campaign for economic, social and cultural rights; and



Noting that the experiences shared and the special conclusions and recommendations reached by each organization at the 5th Bi-Annual meeting require urgent attention:

Decides to:

1. Reach out to the relevant stakeholders to revisit and repeal provisions of the Labor Law of Liberia including section 1508 (on the Dismissal of Workers) which continue to undermine workers across Liberia in terms of the discretionary powers of employers to hire and dismiss. The provision on wages equally requires re-visitation as workers employed by some multi-national corporations such as Firestone Liberia Company continue to earn US\$60.00 (sixty United States dollars) monthly. The meeting learned that policy makers including those at the Ministry of Labor are aware of the undermining role of this provision but believe that until repealed, it remains binding despite reported consequences;
2. Call on the Government of Liberia to independently investigate the circumstances around the recent restrictions on motorcycle riders in Monrovia including the reported theft of motorcycles by police officers arresting them on the streets and to ensure justice and due compensations based on the findings. The meeting was saddened by the apparent conspiracy against motorcycle riders in Central Monrovia including the ban on their movement despite their strategic role in the local economy and transport industry including the demand (by the Government of Liberia) for payment of license plates when license plates were never delivered to many of the customers or “Pem-Pem riders”¹ who paid in the 2012 fiscal year. The meeting noted that the harassment of pro-poor businesses such as motorcycle riders in Liberia has social, economic and security implications if you consider that a lot of the war-affected youth have traded violence for peace and that, in a way, their abstinence from violence, is further guaranteed if they remain economically engaged;
3. As a precondition for awarding natural resource rights, ensure robust scrutiny of all multinational corporations with business interest in Liberia including rigid follow-ups actions and deep inquiries about their reason(s) for selecting Liberia for such investment(s) and their records on human rights, environmental practices and corruption. This includes readiness-levels and expertise in Liberia to effectively monitor the exploitation of the country’s vast natural resources and access to and interpretation of technical reports on mineral discovery, valuation and processing. The meeting observed the lack of oversight mechanisms or monitoring efforts across all concessions granted by the Government including information that such unchecked behavior continues to serve as loopholes for dual mining and excessive control over and conversion of natural resources rights not given in contracts. In places where monitoring activities are reported, the meeting noted that they appear cosmetic, inadequate and unreliable;
4. As a matter of policy, ensure proactive engagement with new communities whose rights may be potentially affected when a concession is awarded over community-based natural resources. As a necessary first step, the meeting agreed to ensure proactive engagement in Lofa County over the ongoing negotiations (by the Government of Liberia), despite public outcry, to award the Wologizi Range as a preventive measure to the violation of community rights. The meeting noted the urgent need for early

¹ The local name for transport motorcycle riders across Liberia



engagement to help adequately prepare local communities to participate in the negotiations—no matter their remoteness—and ensure the protection of community rights which are being consistently violated in the award of concessions across Liberia. The meeting recalled that, despite attracting US\$16 billions as foreign direct investment to Liberia from multinational corporations, the Government of Liberia has no real tract record of best practice in terms of community consultations, protection and benefit-retention in the granting of concessions, contracts, licenses and permits over community-based resources;

5. Promote real equity in community-company relations across Liberia, rather than the usual social contracts that only commit companies or multinational corporations to building a school or a clinic in the community. The meeting agreed to translate community rights into equity and a seat at the table with potential investors. This means communities will no longer weep on the shoulders of Government as they equally value and consider themselves as investors possessing capital (such as land, forests, etc) which can be economically transformed with cash or money introduced by another investor or a multinational corporation;
6. Urge the Government of Liberia to fully investigate the five-year plan for the export of iron ore by ArcelorMittal and to ensure that community consultations are held based on FPIC on this plan which could potentially affect community members now and in the future. ArcelorMittal is currently expanding its facilities, in a five-year plan, to increase the tons of iron ore produced or shipped annually but the expansion has not truly met the internationally required consultations of the affected communities based on their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC);
7. Condemn and call for an independent investigation into the shameless monopoly of power and control in Maryland County with Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC) or former Cavalla Rubber Corporation (CRC) through its parent company SIFCA (which is a French Agro-Industrial Conglomerate with branches located in Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria) exercising administrative and managerial control over three (3) of the main companies in Maryland County with employment potential. SIFCA/CRC reportedly controls the administrative decisions at the Maryland Oil Palm Plantation (MOPP) formerly Decoris Oil Palm and the Liberia Sugar Company (LIBSCO) and how this form of excessive power is already restricting the rights of some workers who are unable to freely move to any of these companies in search of a better job or life. The meeting noted that given the common practice of most multinational corporations in terms of how they often easily become a Government unto themselves with absolute rights, outside Monrovia, the Government of Liberia should move in to break this monopoly of power and to ensure independence of these concessions. The meeting could not understand the message in terms of accountability and financial capability that these concessions are under one management but different names. The meeting was warned against the repeat of October 2011 when residents of Pleebo-Sidiken District in Maryland County boycotted the October 11 polling on ground that the Government of Liberia had imposed a concession agreement (SIFCA) which was mowing down their forests, secret and ancestral bushes and farmlands. Farmlands were taken away and residents were being left with nothing for themselves and their children;



8. Ensure accountability of the Social Development Fund in Grand Bassa County. Despite the disbursement of social development funds, there is little transparency and accountability of the allocation process;
9. Ensure that mining, agriculture and forestry concessions are prevented from taking on additional roles not mentioned in their contracts. Due to the lack of rigid oversight and monitoring of concessions awarded, affected communities have witnessed the unilateral interpretations of contract terms including concessions boundaries which overlap areas of customary land rights;
10. Ensure that several concession agreements such as the Liberia Agricultural Company (LAC), the Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC), etc are re-negotiated consistent with international best practice. The physical deteriorating state or tattered nature of the original contracts prevent any serious reading and comprehension;
11. Call for an investigation into the lack of action by the relevant authorities including the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) over the quite but disturbing level of harvest and sale of camwood trees by some dubious Chinese businessmen. The meeting was informed that this enterprise is occurring mainly around towns and villages in Lofa County with Chinese businessmen in cohort with powerful local insiders. Community member term the practice as an abuse of community-based resources counting on the lack of revenues to the Liberian state and affected communities;
12. Call for an independent investigation of the attacks against women making backyard gardens such as vegetables and, occasionally, sugar cane, for survival, in District 1, Margibi County. The women openly plant crops in the presence of security officers from Firestone Liberia Company but during maturity or harvest of these crops, security assigned at Firestone have moved in, without notice, to completely destroy these crops either by uprooting them or using chemicals. The meeting was informed that the affected women are afraid to challenge the violations and destruction of their vegetables and crops in fear of reprisal from Firestone. The meeting lamented the ceding of vast tracks of customary lands to multinational corporations, across Liberia, while depriving fringe communities or true owners of farmlands the right to live through honest means;
13. Accept the payments for mining claims but to also urge the Government of Liberia and ArcelorMittal to address concerns about crop compensation and the permanent loss of mining claims. Nimba County noted that the payment for mining claims drowned or destroyed by ArcelorMittal in the construction of the sedimentation dam is commendable but residents are dissatisfied over the permanent loss of their claims including fears that Gbapa will lost its status as a diamond mining community and that without expertise to robustly monitor these claims, community members are fearful that ArcelorMittal (with its sophistication in technology) has the potential to mine diamond thus leaving the fields bare during the turning over exercise. Additionally, there are concerns about the crop compensation at ArcelorMittal and the lack of explanation on the resettlement procedure and new planting arrangements. Community members have been planting 500 trees in a given plot of land the Ministry of Agriculture has unilaterally ordered the planting of 150 trees in the same plot thus leading to the unacceptable loss of 350 trees;
14. Closely work with the National Charcoal Union of Liberia (NACUL) to renew attention and support for women charcoalers who are struggling to access sufficient



wood for charcoal production in the forests of Liberia. The meeting agreed to closely follow complaints and then lead investigations, redress and lobby to address violations in the charcoal sector. Apart from transportation challenges and poor recovery methods, the harassment of women for sex and favor have been added to the disadvantages in accessing wood for charcoal production; and

15. Lament and ask the Government of Liberia and the Legislative Caucus of Nimba County to independently investigate the deteriorating situations facing the people of Gbapa, Nimba County, despite being the direct host of the much-celebrated formal LAMCO and now ArcelorMittal. This special investigation should mainly focus on the lack of benefits from the annual US\$1.5millions Social Development Fund to Nimba County from ArcelorMittal; the lack of clinic or hospital for its growing population; the increasing loss of farmlands to grow enough food to feed its population and the loss of profession and prestige as a rich diamond mining community in Liberia.

Signed:

Name	County	Institution	Cell #
McDelvin Ponnie	Grand Bassa	Concerned Citizens' Action Advocacy for the Protection of the Ancestral Land (CCAAPAL)	0886798281
William K. Sando	Bomi	Bomi County Citizens of Advocacy Union	077788415
L. Kutubu Sheriff	Montserrado	Liberia Motor Transport Union (LMTU)	0777271877
Joseph O. Beyan	Margibi	Liberians United For Monitoring, Accountability and Transparency (LUMAT)	0886896003
Tomaul Y. Hoto	Maryland	Maryland Citizens Action Movement (MACAM)	0886601862
Paul Larry George	Montserrado	National Fishery Union of Liberia	0880514635
Olivia Tennie	Bong	Fuamah Citizens Union/Kekeimah	0886690674
Lou Nyema	Maryland	Natural Resources Women Platform	0886798691
Eric Bontor	Nimba	Nimba Advocates for the Environment, Economic Empowerment and Natural Resources Rights (NAEERR)	0886843739
Jacob B. Allison	Gbarpolu	True Advocates of Gbarpolu Resource Rights (TAGRR)	0886303149
Steve Joe	River Cess	Concerned Citizens Caucus of River Cess County (CCCRC)	0776720701



Kessele Sumo	Bong	China Union Affected Workers	0886341990
Lawrence Bloh	Sinoe	Sinoe County Human and Natural Resources Rights Movement	0886141971
Benedict Menewah	Sinoe	AL-BLOTEH, Golden Veroleum Project Affected Communities	0886389068
Boakai F. Kawah	Montserrado	Coalition of Slums and Squatter Communities	0886656868
Alfred L. Brownell	Montserrado	Green Advocates International	0886444472
Oscar Dolo	Grand Cape Mount	Whistle Blowers' Union	0886956138
Victor Quiah	Grand Gedeh	Grand Gedeh Advocates for Community Rights (GGACR)	0886140845
Albert M. Colee	Lofa	Village Development Fund (VDF)	0886533354
Gabriel Brown	Grand Bassa	Buchanan Renewable (BR)- Affected Farmers Union	
Mustapha Foboi	Grand Cape Mount	Sime Darby Project Affected Communities (PAC)	0886963736
Amadu Fahnbulleh	Cape Mount	West Africa Agriculture Corporation (WAAC)-Affected Communities	
Duwalu	Nimba	Citizens Advocacy for Resource Equitable Distribution (CARED-Liberia)	
Abraham Kamara	Margibi County	Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC)- Affected Communities	0886453261
Chris Caneh	Cape Mount	Project Affected Communities (PAC)-Workers, Sime Darby	
Ezekiel Johnson	Montserrado	Gold and Diamond Workers Union of Liberia (GODIMWUL)	0886747977
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The 5th Bi-Annual Meeting of the ARD was held in Gbapa Town, Nimba County. After three (3) days of interactive discussions, the meeting decided to adopt nine (9) significant decisions that aim to solve various prevailing issues, which have been impacted not only the livelihoods of the Liberian people, but also diminished their rights and existence in many aspects. Briefly, these decisions are as follows:

- 1. The decision to demand An Amendment of the Constitution of Liberia to recognize and protect customary land rights:** Among other things, the ARD recalled the urgent need to work with the relevant stakeholders to address the threats posed to land ownership and property rights. The ARD planned to achieve this decision through various legal methods, namely, through a consultation to convene a Referendum to amend the Constitution of Liberia so as to recognize and protect Customary land rights.
- 2. The decision regarding the Observer Status and Admission of New Members:** Among other things, the ARD *recalled* the agreement that Observer Status will be granted new applicants at the meeting except that their participation will be restricted to “Observers” with no voting rights. Accordingly, the ARD planned to achieve this decision through various determinations, namely, to formally grant membership to the Village Development Fund (VDF) after said membership decision (to confer membership) was suspended due to the absence of VDF at the Bi-Annual Meeting in Kon Town, Grand Cape Mount County.
- 3. The decision regarding Communication Offer by Green Advocates International:** Among other things, the ARD *recalled* the financial and bureaucratic difficulties faced by the membership of ARD in disseminating information and challenges through the print and electronic media in Liberia. Accordingly, it made further decisions to achieve this decision, namely, through taking advantage of the communication services at Green Advocates International by contacting its Media Advocates to arrange newspaper publications and special press coverage with free of charge.
- 4. The decision regarding Calls to Disburse Community Benefits in the Forestry Sector:** Among other things, the ARD *recalled* that past logging operations in Liberia never really benefited local communities or allowed them to be part of the decision-making process as it relates to the management of their community-based natural resources. Accordingly, it planned to achieve this decision through further resolutions, namely, through campaigning for the unconditional disbursement of land rental fees withheld by the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Finance.
- 5. The decision regarding Identity (ID) Cards for Members:** Among other things, the ARD recalled that Plenary at the 3rd and 4th Bi-Annual Meetings of the ARD agreed on some of identify card for the membership and then invited the Steering Committee to advice on the best approaches in doing so. Accordingly, the IRD decided to issue ID Cards to all members for a duration of two years at the cost of US\$5.00.



6. **The decision regarding the Need for Policy on Climate Change in Liberia:** Within other observations, the ARD recalled that the environment serves the national, economic, social, cultural and spiritual needs of Liberia and its people and that the Government of Liberia should ensure the sustainable or wise use of the natural resources in pursuance of social and economic development within undermining the ecosystem's renewal and re-supply process. In achieving this decision, the ARD planned to, among other things, lobby with the Government of Liberia and other relevant stakeholders to adopt policies on climate change as well as to encourage the Government of Liberia to help end the debates over the drivers of deforestation by commissioning a comprehensive study on all land use practices but with emphasis on bush fallow or shifting cultivation and large-scale agriculture such as palm oil and rubber.
7. **The decision regarding Women Participation in Activities at the Alliance for Rural Democracy:** Among other recognitions, the ARD recognized that the Natural Resources Women Platform (NRWP) represents the voices of women at the ARD. In achieving this decision, the ARD decided to take the necessary steps, namely, ensuring that the Natural Resource Women Platform meets regularly and not only once a year when ARD is having her Bi-Annual Meeting.
8. **The decision regarding The Need to Adopt a Position on the Draft Petroleum Act of Liberia:** Among other things, the ARD recognized that Liberia has vast natural resources but is at the same time very poor. In accordance with this recognition, the ARD decided to achieve this decision through numerous determinations, namely, to ensure the full and informed participation of all Liberians in the consultations around the Draft Petroleum Act.
9. **The decision regarding The Need to Implement the Special Conclusions and Recommendations From the Sharing of Experiences on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in Liberia:** Significantly, the ARD also recognized that at each Bi-Annual Meeting, the experience sharing session has created the opportunity to assess the performance levels of community members, local leaders and the Liberian Government of Liberia on established human rights standards and/or in relations to economic, social and cultural rights in the new Liberia. This recognition prompted the ARD to carry out further necessary steps. These steps include but are not limited to, reaching out to the relevant stakeholders to revisit and repeal provisions of the Labor Law of Liberia which continues to undermine workers across Liberia in terms of the discretionary powers of employers to hire and dismiss and renewing attention and support for women charcoal-workers who are struggling to access sufficient wood for charcoal production in the forests of Liberia.

