



# Green Scenery

31 John Street, P.O. Box 278, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Tel 232 22 226216. Cell: 232 76 601979. Email: [contact@greenscenery.org](mailto:contact@greenscenery.org) Web: [www.greenscenery.org](http://www.greenscenery.org)

The Country's Natural Resources Are Nature's Gift To Us What We Make Of Them Are Our Gift To Posterity

President of the European Parliament  
Mr. Antonio Tajani  
Bât. Altiero Spinelli  
60 rue Wiertz / Wiertzstraat 60  
B-1047 Brussels  
Belgium

23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2017

Dear Sir,

## THE EUROPEAN UNION'S BIOFUEL POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON SIERRA LEONE

I write to you today from Sierra Leone to express my deepest concerns about the future of the European Union's biofuel policy. By debating the recast of this document, you are currently dealing with an issue that regards the people in my country not less than it does the people in Europe. By deciding about the future of biofuel in the European Union, you are also deciding about my future – and the future of many others in the so-called *developing world*.

Green Scenery is a Sierra Leonean Non-Governmental Organisation crusading for the right to land and the protection of our environment. As founder and Executive Director of Green Scenery, I am a staunch environmentalist. Therefore, I appreciate the European Union's efforts to contribute to climate change mitigation and to protect the environment through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by reverting to renewable energy sources. However, while the *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources* talks about achieving sustainable development, improving citizens' health and inclusive economic growth, I see the people of my homeland experiencing the negative impacts of the Western world's growing interest in renewable energy.



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Let me introduce you to my homeland: Sierra Leone is located on the western coast of Africa and is considered one of the least developed countries in the world. Its population is chronically food insecure, scoring an alarming 35 in the 2016 Global Hunger Index (<http://ghi.ifpri.org/countries/SLE/>). In Sierra Leone, people are highly dependent for their livelihoods and income on land resources of all kinds, with the majority of the population living of subsistence farming. At present, even the local production of rice, my country's main staple, is inadequate to satisfy national requirements. At the same time, the global rush for farmland made Sierra Leone experience the influx of multi-national investment companies, many of them setting up large-scale agribusinesses for the cultivation of sugarcane or oil palm. Today, Sierra Leone's biodiversity and agro-biodiversity are at risk from any policy that encourages monoculture and industrial agriculture.

Oil palm is an endemic species to my country. People all over Sierra Leone produce palm oil, which is the most consumed edible oil in the region and used in nearly all of our local dishes. Simultaneously, palm oil happens to be the cheapest feedstock in the world, thus resulting in an increase of its utilisation in the production of biofuel. This is why today millions of hectares of land all over the world are transformed into industrial plantations. Located on the equatorial belt and blessed with high annual levels of rainfall, Sierra Leone offers one of the world's most favourable geographical locations for palm oil production. In recent years, we witnessed more than 500,000 hectares of our arable land falling prey to large-scale agribusinesses investing in oil palm (Grain – The farmland grab in 2016), with Socfin Agricultural Company, Aristeus Agriculture Limited, Natural Habitats and Agriterra Limited being only some of the respective companies having European roots. Furthermore, in 2010 the Swiss Addax and Oryx Group initiated a large-scale bioenergy showcase in Sierra Leone that was based on sugarcane. Despite the support of eight European and African Development Finance Institutions, Addax Bioethanol Sierra Leone failed and was handed over to a Chinese investor in 2016.

By welcoming foreign investors, decision-makers in Sierra Leone are hoping to enhance our domestic infrastructure, to diversify people's income opportunities, to spur our technological advancement and to increase Foreign Direct Investments. Done the right way, large-scale agribusinesses might be able to support Sierra Leone's development by creating jobs and strengthening our economy. However, my



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country's laws and regulations are not strong enough to protect its people. Land acquisition processes are often intransparent and mostly not participatory. Farmers lose their land without their free, prior and informed consent – resulting in a loss of livelihood affecting present and future generations.

**A reduction of conventional food based biofuels is not enough. The European Union has to abolish its current biofuel policy and to rethink it fully by taking into consideration the global impact it has. Public subsidies and tax releases supporting the production of biofuel are both part of the European and the Sierra Leonean reality, thereby leading to an uncontrollable growth in agri-investment that is putting people in the developing world severely at risk. The attempt to improve Europe's carbon footprint must not be undertaken at the risk and expense of countries like my own.**

I am looking forward to hearing from you on this matter while thanking you for your attention, understanding and efforts.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph Rahall  
Executive Director





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For further information:

Grain (2016): The global farmland grab in 2016: how big, how bad?

(<https://www.grain.org/article/entries/5492-the-global-farmland-grab-in-2016-how-big-how-bad>)

Bread for the World (2016): The Weakest should not bear the Risk. Holding the Development Finance Institutions accountable when private sector projects fail. The case of Addax Bioethanol in Sierra Leone. (<https://landportal.info/library/resources/weakest-should-not-bear-risk>)

Yengoh and Armah (2015): Effects of Large-Scale Acquisition on Food Insecurity in Sierra Leone.

(<http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/7/7/9505>)

ALLAT (2013): Who is benefitting? The social and economic impact of three large-scale land investments in Sierra Leone: A cost-benefit analysis.

(<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2013/who-is-benefitting-the-social-and-economic-impact-of-three-large-scale-land-investments-in-sierra-leone/>)