

PETITION STATEMENT FOR THE PASSAGE OF A PRO-COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS BILL

ISSUED THIS 29TH DAY OF MAY 2018 AD

To our honorable lawmakers of the 54th Legislative Assembly,

We, members of the Liberia Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Working Group on Land Rights Reform , (hereafter the Working Group), a group of 28 CSOs working on land reform in Liberia; working along with the National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL), the Women Land Rights Task Force (WLRTF), communities across Liberia and in the diaspora, and friends from across Africa and around the world are here to present a collection of petitions urging you, our astute lawmakers, to pass a Pro-Community Land Rights Bill.

The Working Group has collected over Seventy *Thousand signatures and Resolutions* supporting the passage of a Pro-Community Land Rights Bill: in all, over *Forty Thousand Liberians*, including a resolution from 45 chiefs from across the country have signed petitions supporting the passage of a Pro-Community Land Rights Bill.

In addition, our call is supported by an international petition of over *30,000 people from more than 25 countries spanning Africa, America, Asia, Latin America and Europe* showing their support and solidarity for Liberian communities and the civil society organizations.

Given that nearly three million Liberians live in rural areas and depend heavily on the land, it is imperative that Liberia recognize and protect these citizens' customary land rights.

Members of the CSO working group include the following organizations: Rights and Rice Foundation (RRI), Sustainable development Institute (SDI), National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL), National Charcoal Union of Liberia (NACUL), Search for Common Ground(SFCG), Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU), Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI), Search for Common Ground, Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), Women NGO secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR), Natural Resource Women Platform (NRWP), Alliance for Rural Development (ARD), Rural Human Rights Activists Program (RHRAP), PARLEY, Farmers Union Network (FUN) of Liberia, Voice of the Voiceless (VOV), Liberia Reform Movement (LRM),

As *President Weah* beautifully stated in his inauguration address on the 24th of January 2018: “Together, we owe our citizens clarity on fundamental issues such as the land beneath their feet, freedom of speech, and how national resources and responsibilities are going to shift from this capital to the counties.”

Our distinguished lawmakers, considering that the majority of Liberians live in rural areas and rely on the land for livelihood security, we urge you all to move expeditiously and in a manner that protects the principles of land tenure security for all Liberians, especially the majority of rural Liberians who contribute significantly to agriculture and food security, but who at present do not have right to ownership or title of the land on which they live and work.

We also call on the President of Liberia to use his good offices and influence in urging the Legislature to be guided by **good conscience, equity and justice in supporting a pro-poor Bill, protecting community land rights. The interests of the people must prevail.**

Furthermore, we like to inform the general public, the government, and the donor community that the longer it takes to pass the LRA, and the longer CSOs and communities are excluded from participating in the lawmaking process, the more communities are left vulnerable to land tenure insecurity, including large scale land transactions and potentially unlawful land grabs by a few group of national elites.

We as a country must continue to align our interest with democratic principles, a pro-poor agenda, and acknowledge that community land rights are a universal norm and no longer an exception.

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