



SOCIALIST MOVEMENT OF GHANA (SMG)

17th January 2022.

STATEMENT ON THE ATTACK ON RADIO ADA AND THE PEOPLE OF ADA-SONGOR

SMG has learned of the brutal armed attack on Radio Ada, Ghana's oldest and best-known community broadcaster on 13 January 2022 at about 11:30am in the morning. This broad daylight attack endangered workers of the Station and studio guests. It resulted in the damage to equipment that is critical to giving Ghana's large Dangme-speaking public information and voice on a wide range of economic, political, and cultural matters

The attackers specifically stated that their objective was to halt the continued broadcast of information and voicing of local public opinion relating to the ongoing struggle over Songor Lagoon between the McDan Group and the people of Ada. They threatened further reprisals if this journalism did not cease. In other words, this was an attack not just on journalists but on our entire Dangme-speaking civilization.

The Songor Lagoon has been the central economic, social, and cultural resource of the Ada civilization for almost five hundred years. It has historically been operated as "commons" - a resource that the people of Ada Songor have shared freely with any persons willing to work and make a living farming, fishing, or salt-winning. Naturally, the people of Ada-Songor have also been more than willing for the resource in all its scientific, environmental, industrial, agricultural, transportation potential to be integrated into the larger development of Ghana in a mutually beneficial way.

Tragically, since the overthrow of the 1st Republic waves of crony capitalist adventurers have sought to use their connections in irresponsible governments to expropriate the Lagoon and turn it into an industrial salt operation – ignoring the Lagoon's fragility environment and social cost of such an approach to its traditional owners and the entire Ada civilisation. Of course, these adventurers have never demonstrated that their schemes serve any conception of a public or national interest. Relying on the strength of their political connections rather than any substantive technical or economic analysis the proposals they have presented to Government are just a formality - shoddy, self-contradictory, and unworkable. What they mostly seek are monopoly rights which they can then re-sell to "foreign investors" at a huge profit. The people of Ada Songor have heroically resisted such schemes to privatise their heritage. Ada-based cooperative movements, youth movements, religious groups (particularly Catholics and traditionalists) have exposed these schemes for the grand theft that they are. The companies faced with this resistance have then invoked the power of the State to suppress local opposition and have typically paid off elements in the Traditional Council to give the appearance of legitimate community endorsement of their activities to satisfy audiences in "Accra" who do not regularly follow or understand the developments on the ground.

The first attempt at expropriating Songor was of course that of Vacuum Salt Products Company Limited. VSPCL operated from the Busia period through to the early PNDC period. At the height of its conflict with the people of Ada it regularly suborned the Ghana Police Service to terrorise and torture citizens of the area. Villages that had stood on the shores of the Lagoon for 300 years were declared trespassers on Vacuum's land. Citizens were beaten. Citizens were compelled to kneel in or chew rock salt as punishment for trespass. Eventually as resistance continued to the Ghana Police Service, resourced by VSPCL staged a raid in the area resulting in the fatal shooting of one Margaret Kuwornu and her unborn child. This caused national outrage, prompting the establishment of a Commission of Enquiry; the termination Vacuum Salt's "concessions"; and efforts by the State to put an integrated development plan for the development of the resource in a manner that optimised its different potentials

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and balanced potentially competing interests. This was the fully engineered “Masterplan” agreed to by all stakeholders.

Tragically, neither PNDC nor subsequent governments followed through with the implementation of the Masterplan. The different sections of the political elite have worked to find ways around the Masterplan consensus to make private profit. This has led to a deterioration of the Lagoon and deepened endemic poverty in Ada.

The Akufo-Addo government in its unprecedentedly unrestrained promotion of private-crony interests over public interests, has taken the assault on Ada-Songor several steps further. It has approved the award of the entire Lagoon to a company called Electrochem Ltd (compared to Vacuum’s one-third). It has done so even though Electrochem has no experience of Salt industry development (or industrial development of any sort) and without the most basic evidence that Electrochem has either the technical competence or financial capacity to develop even their own shoddy project proposal (a textbook case of investor incompetence that would not pass the most basic bank credit committee scrutiny and should not have passed the scrutiny of our professionals in Minerals Commission, the East Dangme Municipal Assembly, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, or the Environmental Protection Agency). The Electrochem plan specifically states an intention to relocate the People of the area to some unspecified location so they cannot interfere with the development of their proposed salt industry. The Akufo-Addo government has even allowed the company to commence works in Songor without even EPA approvals required by law. There have been repeated incidents of violence mostly instigated by Company agents. The Ghana Police Service has responded in a manner that clearly smacks of anti-community bias, or worse. The project is disintegrating the community in other ways. For example, communal respect for the Traditional Council has collapsed because of the public exposure of chiefs’ selling out of the community interest for private gain. This evidence is a secret written agreement between the owner of the McDan group of companies (which also owns Electrochem) and several local chiefs in which they agree to operate as Electrochem’s agents in managing local opinion in return for personal handouts. The action and inaction of Government has created potential for serious violence in this critical community.

Radio Ada has played its expected role as a community broadcaster. It has projected the concerns of community members about the management of their most important communal asset and the insecurity this is generating. It has encouraged discussion of the issues. It has researched, collated, and presented all available information about Electrochem and its project. It has offered all interested parties the company, government agencies (including the Ghana Police Service), traditional leaders to speak to the issues as they arise. Unsurprisingly, the pro-Electrochem actors have declined to speak on open competitive platforms to the issues preferring to use the Ghana Police and Traditional Council to intimidate suspected “agitators”. All these tactics are failing to stem growing resistance to this latest NPP-sponsored attempt to subordinate the interests of possibly millions of Ghanaians and the entire Ada civilisation to the private greed of political cronies. The attack on the Station represents a dangerous escalation in this conflict by those who have no ideas or arguments to justify their positions.

We stand in complete solidarity with the workers of Radio Ada. And we stand with all the People of Ada Songor who are fighting to protect their livelihoods and the national interest. We especially stand with the Cooperative movement and especially the women’s cooperatives who are leading not only resistance to potential genocide but also offering a way forward to productive, peaceful, integrated, and sustainable development of the Songor Lagoon - and many other community resources under threat around Ghana today.

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We condemn this act of brutality and cowardice, and we demand that the perpetrators and those who sent them be brought to justice.

We call on the Ghana Police Service, the District Assembly, the Regional Coordinating Council, the Ministry of the Interior, NCCE, CHRAJ, the National Peace Council and the Presidency to condemn these acts and to take steps to ensure the security of Radio Ada. We demand protection for all people exercising their constitutional right to free speech (whether professionally or in an amateur capacity) and our collective duty to keep Ghanaians properly informed about matters that affect us. We warn that the impartiality, and thus authority, of the State is on the line in Ada and elsewhere. This is not a local matter. Ghanaians are watching.

We call on Organised Labour, the Student Movement, civil society organisations, the Media, the religious establishment, and political parties, to speak up and demand justice and an end to the growing abuse of state power and terrorism in our country to achieve private profit. All of us and the people and interests that we represent are at threat from this trend. Every moment of silence, every moment of tolerance of these abuses empowers violent forces that seek to reduce us to slaves in our own country. It is time to resist.

Kyeretwie Opoku
Convener, SMG.