

## Kono District Development Association United Kingdom (KDDAUK)



### **Kono District: A Call for Justice, Accountability, and Environmental Stewardship**

The diamond-rich Kono District in eastern Sierra Leone has long symbolised wealth and opportunity. However, underlying this prosperity is a stark reality for the marginalised mine workers of Koidu Holdings, whose circumstances require immediate attention. This article examines the persistent challenges these workers face, the lack of response from leaders, the economic disparities, the environmental consequences of mining, its impact on human rights, inadequate compensation, and the necessity for substantial reform.

### **The Struggle for Social Justice**

The Kono District Development Association United Kingdom (KDDAUK), a registered UK charity, is concerned about the working conditions of mine workers employed by Koidu Holdings. These workers experience conditions that are markedly different from the wealth their labour generates. Their wages are insufficient to support their families adequately. Furthermore, the workplace health and safety measures are inadequate. Workers are exposed to hazardous environments with limited access to medical facilities, clean water, and toilet facilities, making them susceptible to injuries and illnesses.

KDDAUK expresses support for First Lady Dr. Fatima Jabbie Bio in her efforts to defend the dignity, rights, and livelihoods of Sierra Leonean workers. Dr. Bio's commitment to justice and accountability has highlighted concerns regarding Koidu Holdings' practices, prompting a call for the company to be accountable for its actions.

Despite ongoing protests and calls for reform, Koidu Holdings' commitments to enhancing conditions have been largely unfulfilled. The workers' requests for equitable wages, improved safety measures, and access to clean water and healthcare have not been addressed, underscoring a systemic neglect of the workers' human rights and welfare.

### **The KDDAUK's Response to Koidu Holdings' Tax Contributions**

Paramount Chief Paul Garba Saquee stated that Koidu Holdings pays \$35 million annually in taxes, making up 81% of Sierra Leone's extractive industry tax revenue. Despite this, KDDAUK is disappointed with Koidu Holdings' handling of workforce disputes and unfair labour practices. KDDAUK also notes that Koidu Holdings violates the African Mining Vision (2009), which aims to ensure natural resources benefit African economies and local communities. The Ministry of Employment, Labour, and Social Security has criticized Koidu Holdings for its unilateral statements and attempts to derail negotiations aimed at resolving the crisis. The government has actively engaged in de-escalating tensions between the company and its workers, yet Koidu Holdings has continued to suppress trade union rights and ignore employee grievances. The KDDAUK

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acknowledges Koidu Holdings' tax contributions but raises concerns about economic disparity. Despite substantial revenue, workers face low wages, poor conditions, and inadequate healthcare. Policymakers must address this contradiction urgently.

### **The Deafening Silence of Leadership**

One of the most concerning aspects of this situation is the lack of response from leaders at all levels—both local and national. Paramount chiefs, members of parliament, policymakers, and government officials have not publicly addressed the exploitation of Koidu Holdings' workers. This silence raises critical questions: Why are leaders not acting in the local interest? What if they prioritized the welfare of their constituents over corporate interests? The absence of decisive action not only perpetuates injustice but also undermines the trust and confidence of the people in their leaders.

### **Economic Disparities in Mining**

A comparison of the economic benefits provided by mining companies operating in other parts of Sierra Leone reveals a stark disparity. In regions where companies prioritize corporate social responsibility, locals enjoy better living conditions, access to education, clean water in their workplaces and healthcare facilities. Why does Koidu Holdings lag in delivering similar benefits to the people of Kono District? This disparity calls for accountability and action from authorities to ensure equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

### **Environmental Impacts of Deep Excavation Mining**

The environmental consequences of Koidu Holdings' deep excavation mining are profound and far-reaching. The district has experienced earth tremors, ground instability, and water contamination due to excessive drilling and blasting. These activities disrupt ecosystems, pollute air and water sources, and pose serious health risks to residents. Kono District, unfortunately, bears a disproportionate burden of the consequences of environmental change, including deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the escalating damage to buildings around the mining areas. These deep excavation mining activities also affect the atmosphere through carbon emissions, which contribute to climate change. While some efforts have been made to mitigate these impacts, they remain insufficient to prevent long-term damage. The absence of comprehensive safety measures and environmental stewardship exacerbates the challenges faced by the community.

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### A Call for Radical Change

The current situation in Kono District is unsustainable and needs immediate change. Civil society, policymakers, and politicians must drive this change. KDDAUK urges:

- **Civil Society:** Advocacy groups should amplify marginalized workers' voices and hold corporations accountable.
- **Government:** Sierra Leone should implement legal reforms addressing mining's environmental challenges and human rights impacts.
- **Policymakers:** Legislators must protect workers' rights, ensure fair wages, and enforce environmental safeguards.
- **Politicians:** Leaders must prioritise constituents' interests and address injustices in the mining sector decisively.

### Conclusion

The issues faced by Koidu Holdings' workers and the wider community of Kono District highlight the critical need for justice, accountability, environmental protection, and respect for human rights. It is imperative that all stakeholders collaborate to ensure that the wealth generated in Kono District benefits its residents, safeguards the environment, and respects the human rights of its workforce. Let this be a rallying call for change—a call that cannot and must not be ignored.

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