



## PRESS RELEASE

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# Halt illegal mining in forest reserves!

**Accra, 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2016.** Ghana's forest reserves are facing an unprecedented surge of mining. Just a few months ago, we (WACAM, Forest Watch Ghana, and Kasa Initiative Ghana) raised concern about Government issuing an entry permit for prospecting in Tano-Offin Forest Reserve. After a number of engagements with the media and other stakeholders the company packed its equipment and left the site. We thought it was a big victory but now we know this was just the beginning.

Evidence gathered by CSOs indicates that other forest reserves such as Upper Wassa, Fure River, Subri and Tonton are seriously under the threat of large scale illegal mining. It is alarming the rate at which mining companies are being granted prospecting licenses into pristine forest reserves, particularly Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas (GSBAs), which Ghana committed to protecting under the 1992 United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. These companies take advantage of these permits to undertake full scale surface mining. The question is have forests been preserved only to be subjected to mining?

"If our forests were given out for mining by Kwame Nkrumah, what forests would have been left for us today? What are we leaving for our future if we are mining in all forest reserves?" A community representative asked during a demonstration in Juabo in the Western Region.

If we have not been able to address illegal mining outside forest reserves, why is the Minerals Commission doling out prospecting licenses for mining in forest reserves? Why are forest reserves protected by the Convention on Biological Diversity being singled out for mining?

"We are in an era where there are global concerns for climate change and the forest seems to be the major solution to averting increasing rise in global temperature so we cannot and should not encourage mining in forest reserves, let alone GSBAs," said Albert Katako, a member of Forest Watch Ghana.

The recent demonstrations by communities in Juabo, Sraha, and Ayiem in the Bibiani Forest District in Western Region clearly show a growing distrust in state institutions, and disgust at wanton illegal mining of forest reserves with impunity with the support of politicians.

The irony of the matter is that most of these illegalities are carried out under the protection of well-armed, muscle-bound men who obstruct and thwart the work of Forestry Commission and the Military. C&G Aleska Mining Company and Gye Nyame Mining Limited, for instance, have deployed private armed security persons into the Upper Wassa and Fure River Forest Reserves, respectively. These private armed security persons obstruct and prevent law enforcement authorities from monitoring their activities in the forests and, furthermore, intimidate

local communities living on the fringes of these forests. This development is rather alarming because a nation with pockets of areas within its borders under the control of private armed security is one nearing chaos.

WACAM, Forest Watch Ghana, Kasa Initiative Ghana, National Forestry Forum Ghana, and over 76 NGOs call on the President and National Security Council to take urgent steps to halt this menace.

Signed

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