



PRESS RELEASE

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Stop Mining in Tano Offin Forest Reserve!

Accra, 14 July 2016. The Tano-Offin Forest Reserve is under threat of mining and this should be a concern to all Ghanaians. Investigations by Forest Watch Ghana, Wacam, National Forest Forum Ghana and Kasa Initiative confirm that Exton Cubic Group, a company with close relations to the seat of power has been granted a permit to mine in the Tano Offin forest reserve located in the Atwima Mponua District of the Ashanti Region. The Offin River passes through this forest reserve which has a total area of 41,392ha (413.92km²). It is the 4th largest Globally Significant Biodiversity Area (GSBA) in Ghana and has been classified as a protected area because of its significant biological importance to human existence. This biologically significant forest reserve is to undergo mining. This action must be stopped.

A visit by a team of journalists to Kyeriaso, near Nyinahin on 8th June, 2016 revealed that the company had already mobilized equipment (a loader and a bulldozer) to the site at Kyeriaso pending the issuance of the permit which has now been issued. The permit issued by the Forestry Commission is dated 10th June, 2016. The records available mention one Michael Mahama as a 50% shareholder in Exton Cubic Group, a company which is said to be backed by a very powerful politician in the country whose might technocrats cannot stand, thus granting it the impunity to mine in the forest reserve. It is interesting to note that the said company had already targeted the Fure River forest reserve in the Western region.

In the last two decades, mining companies have targeted forest reserves and the number of requests for exploration permits to mine in forest reserves has increased.

Mining in forest reserves has been met with resistance not only from CSOs but also from regulators including the Forestry Commission. Justifiably so, considering the increasing degradation of forest reserves, dwindling forest cover and the havoc that surface mining has caused to the State even in the off reserves. A research by International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO, 2011) indicates that Togo, Nigeria and Ghana have the highest rate of deforestation in the world. Ghana has a deforestation rate of 2.19 percent and a deforestation rate above one percent is alarming. Mining in forest reserves will aggravate the already alarming rate of forest degradation in the country and wreak havoc on freshwater systems and watersheds, which are already globally scarce commodities, as well as the entire ecosystem and biodiversity.

Apart from mining in forest reserves contravening the principles underlining the establishment of forest reserves in Ghana, the Forestry Commission has had course to be worried about mining operations in even off forest reserve areas. The Commission presented its comments on mining in forest reserves with a report titled, "Mining in Forest Reserves, Concern of the Forestry Commission"(2002) that:

“Mining companies have often been required to rehabilitate even off-reserve areas they have mined. Although Off-reserve mining has gone on in Ghana for some time, we are yet to see a demonstration from industry any best practice rehabilitation suitable to tropical forests. The Commission is thus hesitant about destroying more areas with the hope of rehabilitating them. We believe we should get the rehabilitation methods right in off-reserve forests before venturing into Forest Reserves.”

What has changed to warrant such wanton destruction of natural resources in Ghana especially when the people involved are close to the seat of power? Ghana and the world have been experiencing catastrophic weather conditions due among others to bad regulation and misuse of natural resources. Thus, it is suicidal for anyone to think of further destroying the little pristine environment that is left after the massive extractivism that has characterised governments of developing countries including Ghana.

We are calling on and supporting regulators to live up to the task that the citizens and the Constitution of Ghana has entrusted them with. We have a responsibility as citizens and if we fail in these endeavours, posterity will judge us. Such disregards to order must stop and stop fast!

We also wish to call on the President of the Republic Ghana and Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the custodian of the Reserve, to help save our forest reserves, at least for our children.

For More Information Contact

- Albert Katako 0244642186
- Kwame Mensah 0543521020
- Hannah Owusu - Koranteng 0276965748
- Doreen Asumang-Yeboah 0208822636
- Samuel Mawutor 0246852432