

**PRESS STATEMENT OF THE COALITION OF STUDENTS IN
CONSERVATION (COSIC) 11/10/2017**

PRESERVE ATEWA FOREST RESERVE FOR OUR WATER TODAY & TOMORROW

"...We shall measure our progress by the improvement in the health of our people; by the number of children in school, and by the quality of their education; by the availability of water..."

Words of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah Ghana's First President in a broadcast to the nation on 24 December 1957.

Clearly and more than ever Ghana's water resources specifically, the sources which comprise of our surface water bodies like streams and rivers are under threat. The UN Forum on Forests, indicates that around 1.6 billion people worldwide depend on forests for their basic needs of food, water, medicine, fuel, energy and income. It is projected that by 2025, some 1.8 billion people will face absolute water scarcity, and even greater numbers will deal with water stressed conditions. According to UN, three-fourths of the freshwater people use every day, comes from forested catchment areas. We are all alive today because we have water in our human system. Our existence as humans on this planet as well as all other life forms is possible because we have water.

In March, 2017, during the World Water Day celebration, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research predicted a major water crisis by 2030 in Ghana. Even dreadful is the fact that, we are polluting our surface water bodies and the menace of Galamsey is clear case in point. Our underground water sources are increasingly becoming contaminated and unwholesome according to research by Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research Ghana (CSIR).

These current research findings should prick all of us to wake up in securing our fresh water sources and catchments within the country to ameliorate possible future water scarcity episodes.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the media, one critical water source in Ghana, is the Atewa Forest Reserve. The forest provides water to over 5 million Ghanaians spread across the Greater Accra Region, Eastern and parts of the central region. It is interesting to know that, the Densu, Ayensu and Birim River all take their source from the Atewa forest Reserve.

On the 25th of June, 2017, the Vice President of Ghana His Excellency, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia announced a partnership agreement with the Government of China for a 15-Billion-dollar facility in exchange for Ghana's Bauxite resources to support the country's massive developmental agenda. Reports from the discussions with the Chinese indicate that, one of the targeted areas for this mineral exploitation is the Atewa Forest Reserve.

We wish to state clearly that, as students, we are not against the government of Ghana leveraging on our many bauxite mineral deposits to develop our beloved country. Indeed, Ghana is a nation blessed with many mineral resources and the exploitation of these to drive economic growth and development is not out of place. However, we are concerned about the plans of government in this new MOU with the Chinese to extract bauxite beneath the Atewa forest reserve which provides water to many Ghanaians. We appreciate the efforts by government to raise the needed funds to address the developmental needs of our people in terms of jobs, health care, energy, roads, sanitation and potable water. However, this must be done without creating situations and/or conditions whose consequences threaten our existence now and in the future. We are dumbfounded that, for an agreement like this, the Office of the Vice President has managed to shroud it in secrecy, depriving Ghanaians the opportunity to discuss thoroughly. Transparency it is said, is the hallmark of democracy, and for a government that prides itself in strong democratic and good governance credentials, one would have expected better.

As Ambassadors of this Important water tower-Atewa Forest reserve, we agree and stand with many well-meaning Ghanaians and all civil society organizations as well as research institutions calling for the delisting of Atewa Forest Reserve from areas targeted for bauxite mining; particularly for its Water provisioning functions in this new deal with the Chinese.

We call on the President, H.E Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and his Vice, H.E Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia to as a matter of urgency:

1. Publish and share the details of the MOU signed with the Chinese government, so the Ghanaian public can make healthy and informed decisions and also pave the way for deliberations and solutions to foster sustainable development, bearing in mind the details of the barter-trade agreement.
2. Delist Atewa Forest Reserve from targeted areas for bauxite mining before the final agreement takes full force in order to secure our water supply for

today and tomorrow. Undertaking extractive industry investments for development is certainly the right of every country, but we need to thread with caution and to be visionary thinkers by not killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

3. We appeal to H. E the President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo to use his Executive Power to declare Atewa forest as a National Park. This will provide some level of security and stability for the implementation of sustainable activities and also, entrench Ghana’s commitment to the SDGs, particularly Goals 6, 13, 11 and 15.
4. Intensify efforts in the fight against “Galamsey” which has caused massive pollution of major rivers and water bodies in the country including River Pra and the Birim River.

We make these calls, drawing inspiration and motivation from His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo’s own words on the day of his investiture as president of the republic of Ghana: ***“...We should all recognize the danger we face by the alarming degradation of our environment and work to protect our water bodies, our forests, our lands and the oceans. We should learn and accept that we do not own the land, but hold it in trust for generations yet unborn and therefore have a responsibility to take good care of it and all it contains...”***

We see value and purpose in this cause and like we always do and now more than ever before, we are using our print and media platforms to not only raise awareness but to inspire all Ghanaians everywhere and the international community to rise up to the occasion and safeguard the Atewa Forest, and all other water sources in Ghana including rivers and streams that provide our Water.

