

23rd July, 2018

For Immediate Release

To all Media Agencies

MINING BAUXITE IN ATEWA CANNOT BE RESPONSIBLE IN ANYWAY!

Our attention has been drawn to a statement made by the Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, Mr Peter John Amenu, asserting that the government would engage in responsible, sustainable and friendly environmental practices in mining bauxite in the Atewa Forest. He is also quoted to have indicated that, the government would take a cue from international best practices regarding responsible mining to safeguard the environment and health of the people.

These statements he is on record to have made when he spoke to Journalists in Takwa-Nsuta in the Western Region after he led a delegation to the Ghana Manganese Company on Friday, the 20th of July, 2018.

As a coalition of civil society organizations who have on countless occasions reached out to government to secure Atewa Forest for its water provisioning service and as result rescind all plans to target this watershed for bauxite. We therefore find this pronouncement by the Minister, unfortunate, in bad faith defeating the very ethics of responsible and sustainable mining practices he is alluding the government will abide by.

In view of all the evidence, information and concerns raised by several civil society groups, state agencies and local and international voices of reason in respect of the specific targeting of Atewa Forests for bauxite mining, there is no doubt, the Minister's statement is seeking to justify a reason to destroy the source of water for 5 million Ghanaians.

If we are to take the statement of the Minister by its true intent then there is a need for all of us to clearly understand the principles that underpins responsible mining and sustainable use of resources and for which the Minister so refers to. Again we will elaborate five (5) reasons why turning a watershed that provides water to 5 million Ghanaians into a mine pit is not a good idea.

In respect of the government's commitment to ensuring responsible mining, we are sad to observe that the government has right from the word go, abused the basic tenets of responsible mining. Their posturing of non-disclosure, non-engagement and close door agreement brokering despite the countless requests for transparency by communities and CSOs defeats all intents to ensure responsible and sustainable mining wherever bauxite mining will occur, much less in a critical watershed like the Atewa Range Forest Reserve.

Responsible mining embodies four overarching principles of Business Integrity, Planning and Managing for Positive Legacies, Social Responsibility, and Environmental Responsibility.

- The Business Integrity principles focuses on ensuring that Operating companies conduct businesses in a transparent manner that complies with applicable host country and international laws, respects human rights and builds trust and credibility with workers, communities and stakeholders. This seeks to ensure that mining operations are legally compliant not only to local laws but also to international laws. It also focusses on issues of human rights due diligence, community and stakeholder engagement even before the decision to mine a critical watershed such as Atewa is considered. This unfortunately has not been done so far.

There has been about 12 attempts to mine the bauxite in Atewa, but on all these occasions considerations of negative impact on water, health and well-being led to all these plans being abrogated. Alcoa a bauxite mining company with huge presence in Australia is one of the many companies that understood and appreciated the water services and decided to back out of the Atewa mine interest, also due to local and international pressure. By choosing to mine a watershed like Atewa Forest, the government is clearly sending a signal that they do not care for the concerns of local communities as well as the concerns of the international community in respect of options to secure water and wellbeing for the people in the Atewa landscape. As we write this statement, we are well informed that several development partners and institutions have sent petitions to the Presidency and to the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources urging them not to target Atewa Forest for bauxite mining whatsoever.

The second tenet of responsible mining captures a planning and management process that focuses on achieving a positive legacy for communities and stakeholders. This principle specifically looks at issues of community pre-informed participation in decision making and agreements on the development of mines, environmental impact assessments, and issues of benefits delivery, resettlements and emergency response mechanisms. As far as the second principle of responsible mining is concerned the government has failed woefully in not undertaking a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), even before signing off our natural heritage to foreign investors. The best thing would have been for government to undertake a due diligence of the bauxite resources, opportunities, trade-offs, and critical areas to avoid before going ahead to sign deals. If the Minister claims this work has been done, then we invite the Minister and government to share this information publicly, because our checks proves that no such studies has been done.

The third and fourth principles look at Social and Environmental Responsibility which also include quality of life of not only mine workers but most importantly of communities. With respect to environmental quality, principles promote engagement with stakeholders to ensure that mining is planned and carried out in a manner that maintains or enhances environmental values, and avoids or minimizes impacts to the environment and communities. A key area of interest with respect to the environmental responsibility principle is the need to protect biodiversity, maintain the benefits of ecosystem services and respect the values being safeguarded in protected areas. Respecting value of protected areas will mean not targeting areas that are irreplaceably significant for water provisioning and a haven for biodiversity.

We are happy to observe that, the governments' bold actions to halt galamsey which was destroying rivers and streams across the country has yielded some positive results. We cannot say we are there yet, but definitely the government must be applauded and so must the media and all civil society groups that contributed to making this success possible.

This said, we must indicate that, should government ignore local and international community concerns on targeting Atewa Forest into a bauxite mine, government will in effect be perpetuating the largest irresponsible galamsey activity ever in the history of this country.

Permit us to share with you the five reasons why we say, any attempt to mine the Atewa watershed will be irresponsible:

1. The plan to convert a watershed that provides water to over 5 million Ghanaians into a mine pit.
2. The plan to sacrifice water for 5 million Ghanaians for low grade bauxite mine which will bring untold water stress and hardship to communities on the fringes.
3. The failure of government to undertake a Strategic Environment Assessment and due diligence as to the feasibility and trade-off for bauxite mining a watershed like Atewa before going to leverage it for financial deal.
4. There is nowhere in the world where bauxite mining in a watershed has been responsible. It must be mentioned that, all the five (5) major bauxite mines in Australia are not happening in a watershed that is the source of water for 5 million people. We will be comparing oranges to apples if we should use the Australian example as the bench mark in Ghana. The current bauxite mine in Awaso reflects the sad, deplorable state to which bauxite reserves have been managed. The communities are in dire need of amenities and are crying to be liberated. The evidence points to the fact that, there is no way one can mine bauxite in a forest as well as watershed and still claim to be committed to safeguarding the forest.

5. Atewa Forest is a hill sanctuary watershed that was set aside as far back as 1927 by traditional leaders within the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area. Destroying such a rich heritage and watershed will be unimaginable.

To remove all doubt, and in few words, let us to explain what bauxite mining entails:

1. Bauxite is generally extracted by open cast mining, being almost always found near the surface, with processes that vary slightly depending on the location.
2. Before mining can commence the land needs to be cleared of timber and vegetation. The layer under the top soil is known as the “overburden”. On some surface deposits there is no overburden, and on others, the bauxite may be covered by up to 20 meters of rock and clay. On average, overburden thickness is around 2 meters.
3. The bauxite layer beneath the overburden is broken up using methods such a blasting, drilling and ripping with very large bulldozers. Once the bauxite is loosened into manageable pieces it is generally loaded into trucks, railroad cars or conveyors and transported to crushing and washing plants or to stockpiles, before being shipped to alumina refineries, which are generally located close to bauxite mines.

The process outlined will clearly destroy any semblance of forest that exist now. Any attempts to restore the area after mining in a period of minimum 25 years will be a sorry state of its original self, with water services and endemic species together with other species lost

We acknowledge that the prospects of jobs for the people has blinded our ability to see a future without Atewa Forest. We are so focused on the short-term economic gain we fail to see the weaknesses in the promise.

Early assessment of the potential jobs, show that, the figures are misleading and have highly been bloated to make a destructive business seem promising when in actual fact it is not.

1. Awaso Bauxite mine with a deposit far larger than what is in Atewa has been mined for over 78yrs and in all its lifespan the highest number of people that has been employed comes close to 900 people. Currently, the Awaso mine can only bauxite of a maximum of 300 permanent staff with all others being casuals. It is everyone’s guess how much real jobs can be created from the Atewa mine if we are really to give it a critical political and economic assessment. The promise of jobs is clearly a fallacy.
2. Bauxite mining is now about 80 mechanized. With the current skill set of the people in the landscape, the only jobs we can be assured of, will be either early integrity works for bauxite infrastructure or other menial jobs. Even with this, we will be lucky if the Chinese do not appropriate all the jobs, local content and all in the contracts. This is why we are cautioning all the various groups who are so excited about the promised jobs to rather explore more sustainable job options. Atewa Forest’s relevance

Clearly, we cannot rely on the words of the Minister in respect of the government's commitment and ability to ensure responsible and sustainable mining when the government has already failed to ensure transparency in its close door planning to target Atewa Forest for a bauxite mine.

There is no doubt that targeting Ghana's most crucial water tower, which is also the source of potable drinking water for over 5 million Ghanaians is not worth any amount of revenue and so called jobs that bauxite mining will bring.

Thank you.

Signed

Coalition of NGOs against Mining in Atewa
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