

GHANA INSTITUTE OF FORESTERS (GIF)



Communique From the 21st Annual General Meeting of the Ghana Institute of Foresters.

Ho. Volta Region. Ghana. West Africa.

For Immediate Release

We are issuing this communique as members of the Ghana Institute of Foresters, which is the registered body regulating the broad practice of Forestry in Ghana, with expertise in natural resources management in the public, private, civil society, academia and research sectors. This is coming from broad consensus reached agreed as part of our 21st Annual General Meeting, in Ho, Volta Regional Capital. The venue is instructive because this year our theme is 'Harnessing Our Tourism Potential; The Role of the Forester' and as we all know the Volta Region has an enviable reputation of being a rich and exciting tourism destination in Ghana.

We deem it appropriate and opportune to convey our appreciation of the opportunities and also express our concerns and challenges in relation to enhancing our natural resource and forestry related developments within the country.

Foremost, as foresters, the natural resource and forest estate wealth of Ghana is not lost on us. The opportunity to further enhance the value of these resources is very much appreciated and as professional institute we are committed to working with all sectors of society to ensure value addition and enhancement of the natural resource assets for our wellbeing and also to build prosperity in line with government development agenda of 'Ghana Beyond Aid'. Further to this, we see a great opportunity for all state agencies to reorient natural resource and forest related developments to green business models to ensure we all get the maximum benefit, particularly in supporting sustainable development. Development planning should not only focus on the extractive industries at all cost, but also explore with a business sense the non-extractive values and services that our forests and natural resources provide.

As a body of professionals, we see tremendous opportunity in value added, transparent and inclusive development of the engine of our tourism industry, which is our forest reserves, protected areas, strict nature reserves and green public spaces, and our cultural heritage, all of which are the toast of diverse categories of visitors and explorers travel to Ghana as an emerging tourism destination.

Acknowledging these opportunities, we are mindful of the tremendous obstacles to achieving accelerated development of tourism infrastructure and assets taking advantage of our natural

resources, as we seek to rub shoulders with the world tourism giants like Singapore, South Africa and Kenya. Key among these obstacles identified include; the inaccessibility and poor site management of these tourism destinations. Also, the extractive interests mainly fueled by political interests to serve short-term economic development agenda. These obstacles lead to increased unsustainable legal and illegal mining and logging activities in protected areas, forests reserves and green spaces in Ghana.

Mindful of these obstacles, we are equally concerned of the interest of government to mine the source of water for over 5 million Ghanaians, the Atewa Range Forest Reserve located in the Eastern Region of Ghana, which is considered the jewel in the crown of Ghana forests and globally recognized as Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), as well as a Globally Significant Biodiversity Area (GSBA) and thus holds high importance for the global persistence of biodiversity.

In view of the above, we are therefore making the following recommendations:

- Government should use its enabling development role, to create access to these tourism destinations in the country
- The government and private entities should endeavor to develop and pursue sustainable tourism with the mindset of sustainable businesses.
- Government and the political elite should leave the management of natural resources and forest reserve estates to the guidance of professionals. There is a need to limit political interference in the management of natural resources.
- The Ghana Institute of Foresters should be seen as key partner in development and should be involved in all key decisions taken by government in relation to natural resources.
- We strongly add our voice to other advocates against mining in the Atewa Forest, and rather urge government to pursue green development such as tourism development, and cocoa processing value addition within the landscape, among other opportunities.

Thank you.

Signed

The President

The Ghana Institute of Foresters