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For immediate Release
To all Media Houses

Saving Atewa Is Imperative for Water, Sustainable Development Goals and Ghana's Wellbeing

Recent developments at Atewa Range Forest Reserve on Thursday 30th May 2019 which has seen the commencement of mining related activities has necessitated we respond and bring clarity to some of the issues raised and support the countless efforts by well-meaning Ghanaians calling on the government of Ghana to ensure due diligence in the Ghana bauxite development agenda.

We can confirm from eye witness accounts that a company has begun bulldozing its way into the evergreen upland ecosystem, a protected watershed providing water for more than 5 million Ghanaians; a haven for biodiversity subsequently dubbed the "crown jewel" of Ghana's forests; and a legally protected Hill Sanctuary and Globally Significant Biodiversity Area. The Atewa Forest Reserve is a protected forest in the Eastern Region of Ghana and a source of water for over 5 million Ghanaians. This is against the countless precautions by several institutions and individuals, home and abroad. The latest cautions have come from the Christian Council of Ghana and also US Forest Services (USFS), via US Embassy upon a request for technical support by the government of Ghana. We are also reminded by caution statements issued by some members of the Forestry Commission, Scientists and the Ghana Institute of Foresters, several diplomatic missions, just to mention a few.

Public and media outcry have compelled H.E Nana Addo to make certain pronouncements, we ask every citizen of Ghana to demand answers and ask for due diligence with respect to intentions of government to mine bauxite in Atewa Forest Reserve.

The President talked about; legitimate decision and balance and the fact that bauxite mining will not compromise the environment and that he is convinced there is better technology that can get the red mud out without disturbing the wildlife that is in the Atewa Mountains, employing international best practices. Finally the President also indicates that they will keep a close eye on developments.

We want to put on record that we are not against plans by government to exploit Ghana's minerals resources to address development challenges of today. We are however, not in support of any such endeavour if the agenda fails to ensure proper due diligence, which includes a comprehensive trade-off analysis, that consultatively assesses all the social, environmental and posterity-associated costs with that development agenda; a process that is led by a comprehensive Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the whole bauxite industry and subsequently an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for every specific site that will be mined.

Assault on Atewa violates our Regulations and Policies on Sustainable Forest Management in Ghana

That said, we wish to state in the strongest possible terms that the incursion into Atewa Forest on the 30th of May already breaches international best practice and that there is no factual basis for any of the President's reassurances.

Thursday's action, under the watchful eyes of the Forestry Commission, enabled a company to begin bulldozing its way into an evergreen upland ecosystem, a protected watershed providing water for more than 5 million Ghanaians; a haven for biodiversity, known as the jewel in the crown of Ghana's forests.

Disregard for rule of law and Ghana's Forest Management Regime

It should be noted that the Atewa Forest Reserve is a Hill Sanctuary and a Globally Significant Biodiversity Area which is protected under the Forest Management regime of Ghana. According to the Management Plan of the Forest Reserve and again according to Ghana's own state guidelines for mining in Forest Reserves, Atewa Forests, together with all such forests administratively classed as protected are exempted from all mining activities, much less mining exploration. Again, we are fully aware the Ministry has circulated a directive forbidding the granting of entry permits into Forest Reserves for such destructive activities following the recent siege on forest reserves by some small-scale mining companies. The Forestry Commission needs to tell all Ghanaians what happened that these breaches should occur resulting in the destructive activities in a protected forest such as Atewa.

The current activities violates Ghana's Constitution, Ghana's Forest Act (1927), Ghana's Operational Guidelines Regulating Mineral Exploration in Forest Reserves for Selected Companies, Ghana's Environmental Guidelines on Mining in Production Forest Reserves, relevant international treaties Ghana has ratified, and the nature protection statuses accorded to the Atewa Forest Reserve.

Most importantly, our laws require that an environmental assessment is a prerequisite for development undertakings such as these. The Environmental Protection Act, 1994 (Act 490) mandates the performance of an EIA for an undertaking which is likely to have an adverse effect on the environment. The Assessment processes, will give all stakeholders an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process, make any input into the mitigation strategies and importantly identify which areas these developments will not be compatible and therefore be completely avoided. Not conducting such assessment will be an affront of the law and a dent on the integrity of the process.

There is nothing Sustainable and Responsible about Mining Bauxite in a Watershed like Atewa Forest

To H.E President Nana Addo, on legitimacy, high standards and balance, we ask;

Where is the legitimacy when this process is shrouded in secrecy, total neglect and disrespect of voices that oppose the manner in which you are seeking to implement this project, with a mindset of having your way, despite the millions of voices of reason asking you to exempt Atewa Forest from this bauxite agenda?

The Presidents keeps giving us the rhetoric of employing international best practices. International best practice requires that there must be a Strategic Environmental Assessment to account for the many ways in which development of the bauxite sector might affect the environment. Further to this, any specific activity on the ground must be preceded by an Environmental Impact Assessment, including exploratory activity.

The International Finance Corporation Standards recognise that protecting and conserving biodiversity, maintaining ecosystem services and sustainably managing living natural resources are fundamental to sustainable development. The applicability of this Performance Standard is established during the

environmental and social risks and impacts identification process. Other international best practices include ensuring a full disclosure and transparency in all processes. Not only are these international best practice but they are enshrined in Ghanaian law too. A key purpose of an SEA and EIA is precisely to ensure that stakeholders who will be affected by a development do not have to simply accept the assurance of a President or his government. It is not enough that a President gives his personal assurance, nor for his government to claim that it will keep a close eye on developments. Development with this scale of impact requires transparency and independent assessment by experts.

Empty Assurances, without the Necessary Due Diligence

We doubt your assurances also for many reasons. The current process has failed to conduct business in a transparent manner that complies with existing national laws and policies and international laws, respects human rights and builds trust and credibility. The process has so far failed to adhere to human rights due diligence, community and stakeholder engagement even before the decision to mine a critical watershed such as Atewa Forest is considered.

Again, the legitimacy of the decision is questioned as it fails to undertake due diligence assessment that will foster a positive legacy for communities and stakeholders.

On what the President calls, technology and what he has seen, there is clearly every indication that is not factual. According to the Minerals Commission, the bauxite deposits in Atewa are found in a seam on average 6 metres thick, just 1.5 to 3 metres below the surface. Strip mining is the only way to mine Ghana's bauxite due to its closeness to the surface. This method removes all vegetation, habitats and top soil, while the rock beneath is then broken up with explosives. A clear example of the destruction that is caused to forests by bauxite mining is Ghana's existing bauxite mine at Awaso in the Western Region, now a desert of red mud that replaced once thick forest.

Bauxite mining in a watershed anywhere in the world has never been responsible and sustainable, and no amount of executive caveat to that can wish it away. We know there is no "modern technology" that can remove the red mud without first removing the forest that grows on top. In actual fact, if the President has been told that there is a technology that can remove the red mud without destroying the forest cover which supports wildlife; without negative impact on downstream water bodies and underground aquifers, and without the health-related issues associated with the red dust that comes with bauxite mining, then that information is not factual and unproven.

As a coalition, we are willing and ready to learn from such an experience if any exist, so do show us what you are talking about.

We want to use the opportunity to remind the President that as Co-Chair for the Sustainable Development Goals Advocates, he has first watch responsibility, not just to talk about promises of pursuing environmental sustainability, but importantly to ensure that our development plans actually reflect this big talk.

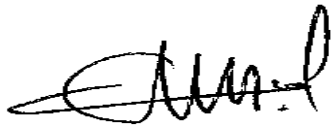
Atewa Forest alone contributes to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 15. Exposing the Atewa Forest to bauxite mining will compromise the SDGs. This is when you are calling to serve as Advocate and Co-Chair for the Sustainable Development Goals matters most, otherwise we are sorry, you are just using your position to preach virtue on international platforms while you actually practice vice at home.

We are also reminding you of your speech in Ouagadougou last year during the 'Rebranding Africa Forum' in which you said **"In our quest to develop, our beautiful lands and rivers are under threat. We are degrading our environment at an alarming rate. Once beautiful and thick forests have been denuded of their cover. Once majestic and all inspiring water bodies have been polluted and many of the animals no longer have safe habitats." This period of destruction forest and water bodies in the name of development at whatever cost, gives us much cause to worry, about our future.**

We call on you to immediately cease all exploration activities in relation to bauxite mining everywhere in this country, subject to the successful completion of broad stakeholder consultation process of a SEA and EIA with its accompanying mitigation strategies as appropriate.

Failure to do this will only confirm that the government is not committed to ensuring best international practices as you so frequently indicate.

Thank you



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Concerned Citizens of Atewa Landscape
KASA Initiative Ghana
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