



Press Release

Ghana set to sacrifice irreplaceable forest and water sources for 5 million people for Chinese-linked bauxite mine

Accra, June 17 – Despite vehement opposition from local communities and international conservation organisations, the Ghanaian government seems determined to proceed with a destructive bauxite mine in the Atewa Forest – a globally important ecosystem that harbours extraordinary wildlife and provides water for 5 million people.

The recent decision to send bulldozers in to start clearing access roads shows that the authorities have decided to plough ahead with the controversial project. If completed, the mine would destroy the forest – one of the world’s Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and home to more than 100 globally threatened species.

Designated as a Forest Reserve in 1926, the Atewa forest is also a critical water source, housing the headwaters of the Birim, Densu and Ayensu rivers, which provide water to local communities as well as millions of people downstream, including in the capital, Accra.

“Despite the government’s assertions, bauxite mining would forever destroy the Atewa forest, leaving extinct species and dried up water sources in its wake,” said Daryl Bosu, deputy national director of A Rocha Ghana, part of a coalition of conservation organisations with over 15 million supporters worldwide that are calling on the government to abandon plans to mine the forest and instead declare it a National Park.

Over 20,000 people have already signed a [petition](#) calling on the government to declare Atewa Forest a National Park.

“It is still not too late for the government to stop this disastrous mine in its tracks and instead champion Ghana’s incredibly rich natural heritage and the interests of the five million Ghanaians who depend on Atewa Forest for their water,” added Bosu.

Unlike Ghana’s existing bauxite mine at Awaso, which locals describe as a “desert of red mud,” Atewa Forest is teeming with life, home to at least 50 mammal species, more than 1,000 species of plants, at least 230 species of birds and more than 570 butterflies – some of which are found nowhere else in the world.

Mining Atewa Forest for bauxite, the main ingredient in aluminium, would push a number of species even closer to extinction, including the endangered white-naped mangabey, the

critically endangered togo slippery frog, and the Afia Birago puddle frog, which was only discovered in 2017.

The government's decision to start tearing down the forest comes just a month after a landmark report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (*IPBES*), which highlighted the threat posed to humanity by the rapid loss of biodiversity and called for urgent global action to reverse the trend.

A recent Global Forest Watch report also estimated that there had been a 60% increase in Ghana's tropical primary rainforest loss in 2018 compared to 2017, the highest in the world.

“The recent UN biodiversity report was crystal clear: protect wildlife or all life on Earth will suffer, including humans,” said Russ Mittermeier, GWC's Chief Conservation Officer and chair of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group. “The government of Ghana has a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate that it is committed to preserving the country's natural life support system and ecosystems that are critical for the health of the global environment by preventing mining in the Atewa Forest and instead designating it a national park.”

In 2016, A Rocha and partners [published a report](#) that showed that protecting Atewa Forest as a national park with a well-managed buffer zone around it – rather than mining it for bauxite – had the highest economic value for the country over 25 years, with tremendous benefits to communities both upstream and down.

A recent US government report concluded that “given the scale, duration, and potential significant and permanent impact of Ghana's Integrated Bauxite Plan, on the Atewa Forest Reserve and water supply of over 5 million people, it is critical to evaluate a range of development and management options (including ... alternatives to mining) to protect drinking water and other ecosystem services.”

Funds from the bauxite mine will be used to repay the Chinese company, Sinohydro, for infrastructure projects in Ghana. SRK Consulting, a global company with offices in Europe and the US, has been contracted to develop the mine plan, with initial reports due this month.

“The Ghanaian government must prioritize what is invaluable for the people of Ghana: Atewa Forest is the crown jewel of the country's biodiversity and the water towers for three major river systems,” said Frederick Kwame Kumah, WWF Africa Region Director. “Bauxite mining in Atewa will cause unimaginable destruction to the forest and river ecosystems and directly impact people's basic livelihoods.”

Simon Stuart, Synchronicity Earth's Director of Strategic Conservation added “if mining proceeds in the Atewa Forest, not only will we seal the fate of several species, including two endemic frogs, but we also set the appalling precedent that mining can proceed in hugely important places for biodiversity without an Environmental Impact Assessment. We call on the Government of Ghana to cancel this project and to stop the damage before it is too late.”

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EDITORS NOTES

- A joint letter was sent to his Excellency President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo of Ghana on the 6th July 2018, highlighting the importance of preventing mining in Atewa, signed by A Rocha, Amphibian Survival Alliance, BirdLife International, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Global Wildlife Conservation, Rainforest Trust and WWF. This letter is available [here](#).
- [Key Biodiversity Areas](#) are sites that make significant contributions to the global persistence of biodiversity. As such, these are considered to be the most important sites on the planet for the conservation of nature. Key Biodiversity Areas and the criteria used to identify them are integral to a number of multi-lateral agreements and global finance processes, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework, and the International Finance Corporation's Performance Standard 6.
- Photos of Atewa Forest are available in this [dropbox folder](#)
- This press release comes from the following organisations: A Rocha International, American Bird Conservancy, Amphibian Survival Alliance, BirdLife International, Guyra Paraguay, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Global Wildlife Conservation, the Rainforest Trust, Synchronicity Earth, WWF.

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