



9th December, 2019

To All Media Agencies

GIADEC SHOULD STOP MISINFORMING THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC

On 4 December 2019, the Ghana Integrated Aluminium Development Corporation (GIADEC) held a media engagement to brief them on latest developments in the sector. The Coalition of NGOs Against MINING ATEWA (CONAMA) has obtained a copy of the statement and we wish to address certain key points made that do not reflect reality.

The statement gave long-known figures for Ghana's bauxite reserves estimated at 920 million tonnes, but what these figures do not make clear is the quantity of bauxite that is available for mining. Some of this bauxite is in forest reserves legally protected from mining. Even if the law permits it, we must question whether it is wise to mine the forests due to the extensive damage that would be caused to watersheds, ecosystem services, wildlife and natural resources exceeding any benefits gained for Ghana's development.

GIADEC also boasted of its stakeholder engagements, saying it understands the important role of Traditional Authorities, local communities and other stakeholders in the process. The statement said GIADEC is now developing 'a robust stakeholder engagement strategy', but this strategy should have been drawn up and shared long ago, and based on the 'Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles that are already available for GIADEC to draw on. The fact that this stakeholder strategy does not yet exist is undermining the rights of local communities to FPIC. This strategy must be shared with all affected communities, civil society groups and other stakeholders for evaluation and to ensure these key stakeholders are included in this process. Transparency so far over the bauxite deal has been woefully inadequate, as identified by the risk consultancy EXX Africa in their 2019 report, meaning stakeholders have been unable to assess the deal or the benefits that government keeps promising.

GIADEC has again stated its commitment to protecting vegetation, water bodies and wildlife in any forest reserve where mining will be undertaken. It gives examples to support this claim. First, it says bauxite has been mined in a sustainable manner in Jarrah Forest, Western Australia. But to restate a point we have made before; Jarrah Forest is a simple forest system with much less human pressure so there is potential for reforestation there. Atewa Forest, by contrast, is a highly biodiverse complex tropical forest so it would not be possible to return it to its pre-mined state of high biodiversity.

GIADEC also stated that 'strip mining' will be used as a 'best practice' instead of 'open-pit mining' to 'reduce noise, dust and the mining footprint'.

However, this was not a choice: strip mining is the only technique available for mining Ghana's bauxite because it lies in flat layers close to the surface and so cannot be accessed by any other mining technique. Strip mining removes the forest and all vegetation over a very wide area, but just may be not all at the same time, so the mining footprint is still very large.

Another technique GIADEC says it will make sure is used is the removal and preservation of topsoil to preserve flora and fauna for later reforestation. It is as if GIADEC believes the forest can be rolled off like a carpet and rolled back again when the mining has finished. It is not that simple. Removing and returning the topsoil will never preserve the vegetation and other wildlife that it there at present. Putting the topsoil back may provide a slightly less difficult substance for plants and trees to grow back again than if there was no topsoil, but tropical plants are very selective and many have difficulty growing back. Reaching the same level of biodiversity after mining will be completely impossible in a highly biodiverse forest such as Atewa.

GIADEC also says it will restrict mining near water bodies. Again this is very simplistic. Three major rivers rise in the Atewa Forest that together provide water for local communities and around 5 million Ghanaians living in Greater Accra. It will not be possible to mine Atewa Forest without affecting these critical water sources. Already, about six tributaries of the River Birim have been identified to fall directly within the proposed safe areas designated for drilling, which is the north of Atewa Forest Reserve. And, even if mining is kept away from the rivers' headwaters, as GIADEC intends, the mining will cause heavy metals to leach from the disturbed soils and be washed into the water sources, polluting them with dangerous heavy metals.

An astounding statement that GIADEC made at the briefing was to say that the mining licence will cover only 90m² of the total 725m² Atewa Forest. This would make Atewa Forest just over one tenth the size of an average-sized football pitch while the area to be mined would be a small fraction, perhaps just the penalty area. We are wondering if this is an attempt by GIADEC to pull the wool over people's eyes or a genuinely confused mistake?

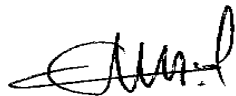
We also question the huge number of jobs promised by GIADEC for the sector, estimated to be 10,000 direct and 25,000 indirect jobs, but we really wonder where all these jobs will be. One of the world giants of the bauxite and aluminium sector – Alcoa – has bauxite mines and alumina refineries and smelters in 15 countries across the world yet employs only 14,000 people. To help Ghanaians make a properly informed decision about bauxite development, it would be really helpful if GIADEC can give a breakdown of specifically where all these jobs can be created and how long the employment is likely to last. The quality of the jobs and the salary that workers can expect is also an issue, especially following the recent unrest at Awaso bauxite mine due to low pay and poor working conditions. Also important are the jobs that will be lost if the forest is destroyed – jobs in farming and cocoa production for example – as well as the green development initiatives that would locate there and provide jobs in tourism and local produce processing, but cannot while the forest is threatened and never will if the forest is damaged. These would be valuable missed opportunities.

For the umpteenth time, government needs to know that there is no contention with the fact that the Sinohydro deal will present positive economic prospects for Ghana. What is clear so far, is that the associated social and environmental trade-off analysis with respect to the targeted locations for this deal is poor and not green, and threatens Ghana's

watersheds, impact negatively on the integrity of a globally significant biodiversity areas, as well as contribute to emissions and destroy an important natural climate solution for Ghana.

We reiterate our demand that Atewa Forest – a site of high biodiversity value and protector of the watersheds for three rivers serving clean water to 5 million Ghanaians – must as a matter of urgency be removed from the planned bauxite development.

GIADec's promises are empty. Atewa cannot be mined for bauxite in a way that will not destroy the forest and its services provision as we know them today. Government must rescind this decision and remove Atewa Forest from the bauxite deal immediately.



Daryl Bosu

Deputy National Director

Tel: 0202555727

Address
P. O. Box KN 3480,
Kaneshie-Accra,
Tel/Fax: +233 (302) 222417
Email: ghana@arocha.org, www.arocha.org,

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