



## **SAVING ATEWA FOREST IS SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES NOT PROPAGANDA**

A Rocha Ghana has read the statements made by GIADEC during a meeting with journalists and published on Monday 5 April, and is responding to key points raised.

GIADEC said it rejects as 'propaganda' an apparent claim that the whole of Atewa Forest will be destroyed by bauxite mining. It says the area it will be 'playing' with – a surprising term to use for an activity that will cause so much damage to livelihoods, species, habitats, and clean water – is about 10% or less over 50 years, and would mine 5 million tonnes of bauxite in that time. To be clear, civil society's concerns are over the location proposed for bauxite mining – that is, the mountain tops – as this is within Atewa's legally protected area and is also the most critical for biodiversity and clean water. Loss of the forest and habitats here would be irreversible and would also cause wider damage to the integrity and ecosystem service provision of a much greater area of forest around it. But GIADEC seems to completely miss this point. Bauxite mining in Atewa Forest, no matter how small, will be a terminal cancer that will erode forest integrity and the ecosystem services they provide overtime. Atewa is a critical forest ecosystem, it is not to be 'played' with.

The statement said that participants were briefed on a baseline biodiversity study of the proposed mining area as part of documenting the area's life forms. But this is unnecessary. Several research documents both recent and old have already been published of the species found in Atewa Forest including the proposed mining area. These reports show that Atewa Forest contains many endangered and endemic species that would be threatened with extinction if bauxite mining goes ahead. Instead of another biodiversity report, an independent Social and Environmental Impact Assessment (ESIA) is what is urgently needed to document how mining will impact on the forest, species, habitats, ecosystem services, livelihoods and access to clean water. An ESIA is supposed to form part of any decision-making process over whether or not a development action should go ahead, but this has not been done.

GIADEC's statements did claim that reclamation plans have been proposed as well as draft report produced. Are these documents publicly available and how can civil society access them for independent examination and validation?

Private sector investors are also urged caution. The IUCN's Resolution 087 passed in November 2020 urging protection of the Atewa Forest and which received overwhelmingly support, "STRONGLY REQUESTS" all companies in the mining sector not to participate in any mining activities in or near Atewa Forest and all companies using aluminium to ensure that no aluminium from Atewa Forest enters their supply chains". The Concerned Citizens of Atewa Landscape (CCAL) have made it very clear that they do not want mining companies entering their forests and destroying their resources, livelihoods, and clean water sources. Civil society supports their stand and urges caution to any private sector company interested in mining bauxite in the Atewa Forest. A number of aluminium user companies have already

stated their objections to aluminium produced with bauxite from Atewa. If GIADEC is to fulfil its stated commitment to international best practices and standards, the Atewa Forest must be completely off limits to bauxite mining.

GIADEC has done one good thing, though, by raising the issue of illegal mining and forest destruction in Atewa Forest, stating we will one day “get up and find that there is no forest at all”. Civil society has also made this point countless times over the years. The destruction of state gazetted forests by illegal activities should be the concern of any state agency that has the wellbeing of Ghanaians at its centre. Citizens should not have to fight our government agencies to ensure that we benefit from the judicious and sustainable use of our natural resources. Or is the government and its agencies deliberately allowing the forest to be decimated by illegal actors, to serve as justification for mining it? A typical case of “give the dog a bad name so you can hang it”? (while communities continue to suffer the impacts?) The problem observed by GIADEC will only get worse with bauxite mining: building mining roads into closed forests opens up currently inaccessible areas to illegal operators. The illegal mining and logging you see today will flourish in the protected area once GIADEC facilitate access for illegal actors.

There are currently several non-extractive uses for forests such as Atewa Forest that have significant prospects of harnessing green investments that will offer quality green jobs and ensure wellbeing for all.

We urge GIADEC to work with us to explore these green investments for the benefits of Ghanaians today and tomorrow.

**For more Information:**

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