

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**PRESS STATEMENT: THE CONTRADICTIONS IN GHANA'S FOREST RESTORATION CLAIMS AT COP 29**

**Accra, Thursday, November 21<sup>st</sup> 2024:** President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's recent statement at UNFCCC COP 29 in Baku, where he declared Ghana has restored **721,000 hectares** of forest since 2017, demands critical scrutiny. While forest restoration is a pertinent goal, this claim starkly contrasts with the government's active supervision, culpability and record of inaction resulting in unprecedented escalation of illegal and irresponsible mining across the entire country that has left forest, agricultural lands, rivers and water bodies destroyed.

The President's announcement fails to align with the stark realities on the ground. While we were supposedly planting trees, we simultaneously and actively pursued policies and legislation that facilitated the destruction of natural forests, undermining Ghana's hard-earned reputation and progress in sustainable forest management over the past two decades.

A glaring example is Ghana's contradictory actions in 2022 and thereafter. That year, the country joined the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership, committing to protect forests and communities. Yet, in the very same year, the government working with a hang parliament of the NPP and NDC passed Regulation L.I. 2462, which opened Ghana's protected forests to mining activities. This period has also seen an unprecedented wave of mining leases that risk converting production and protected forests into sprawling mine pits. Again, illegal and irresponsible mining has significantly undermined Ghana's credibility as a member of the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership. Ghana's direct actions or omission have failed to uphold commitments outlined by the partnership, contradicting its leadership in forest conservation and climate action.

Instead of genuine restoration, our lived reality has been staggeringly devastating. **Over 48,000 hectares of gazetted forest reserves are earmarked for conversion to mining areas and 4800 hectares already destroyed by Ghana's irresponsible mining pursuit.** So far, not less than, 35 forest reserves have been severely impacted by the activities of illegal miners. All together the ecological integrity of over 350,000 hectares of forests will be severely comprised as result.

The Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) reports that over 68% of cocoa farmlands in the Ashanti Region, 81% in the Eastern Region, and 74% in the Western Region have been severely affected by illegal mining<sup>1</sup>. In just one year, from 2022 to 2023, an estimated 21,000 hectares of cocoa farms were lost to the galamsey scourge. These figures highlight an environmental crisis of catastrophic proportions, far outweighing any claimed progress in forest restoration. Beyond the forest reserves and cocoa farms, we have also seen how large

<sup>1</sup> <https://citinewsroom.com/2022/04/cocobod-research-reveals-widespread-destruction-of-cocoa-farms-due-to-galamsey/>

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acreages of forest patches outside forest reserves and water basins, as well as destroyed across the country. This is retrogression that we should never be proud of.

If there is any recognition to be given, it should go to the citizens and CSOs working in our communities across the country. It is our unwavering vigilance, activism, and relentless demand for accountability that have compelled you to act towards securing a healthy environment for all. Even so, we are having to fight our government who failed to address the impunity by persons connected to the Executive and further frustrated the efforts by suppressing dissent and abusing the rights of people to protect their communities against irresponsible mining.

### **Failed Galamsey Fight Undermining Forest Restoration Efforts in Ghana**

**Mr. President, we demand answers. What happened to the promises you made to the people of Ghana—the botched fight against galamsey, the broken commitments to citizens, and the failed assurances of the enhanced measures to Ghanaians? You vowed to deploy the military to protect our rivers, where are the updates, and what tangible results can you show Ghanaians?**

When you stood before the world in Azerbaijan and delivered what can only be described as a pretentious statement about moving “*from dialogue to action*,” it was a moment that called for introspection. Would your actions and realities in Ghana match those words? Did you listen to yourself as you declared, “*as a father and grandfather, I question what world we would leave behind*”? You need to take a moment to reflect on the legacy you are also leaving behind for Ghana, and ensure that your actions align with your words.

Under your watch, Ghana has endured one of the most environmental outstandingly bad and shocking destructions in its history. Our forests are razed, our rivers poisoned, our farmlands degraded, all at the hands of illegal and irresponsible mining which you have failed to decisively address. You have overseen an era of environmental neglect that has exposed citizens to grave health risks, while compounding our vulnerability to climate shocks and catastrophes.

Mr. President, have you truly reflected on how future generations will remember your time in office? Will they regard you as the leader who stood idly by while Ghana’s natural heritage was recklessly plundered, or as the one who, despite the challenges, summoned the courage to take bold and decisive action to rectify this grave injustice?

Regrettably, every illness, every fatality, and every community devastated by galamsey and unlicensed mining pollution will indelibly mark your legacy. Your inaction is threatening the lives of powerless rural communities who have no alternative water sources. It is deeply shameful, lacking intergenerational visioning and can only be a reflection of poor leadership and natural resource governance.

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Mr President, the question now is whether you will use the little time left to rewrite this narrative or leave behind a legacy of inaction, complicity, and irreversible damage to the natural heritage of Ghana that you vowed to protect when you were sworn into office on 7th January, 2017.

The clock is ticking.

END

Signed for the Ghana Coalition Against Galamsey

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#### ***About the Ghana Coalition Against Galamsey***

*The Ghana Coalition Against Galamsey (GCAG) comprises coalitions and a network of organisations from 10 blocks: the Media, Labour, Religious Groups, Youth Groups, Research and academia, Pressure Groups, CSOs, Professional Bodies, Traditional Leaders, and Business bodies.*

*The Coalition is a common platform for all 'Against Galamsey Groups' (AGG) to harmonise advocacy and social action interventions in the fight against galamsey. We believe that only through unity and collective action can we effectively combat this issue.*

*The focus of the campaign against illegal mining activities is not limited to gold exploitation, but includes all mining offences committed under the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) based on the premise that the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, states that any mining activity that takes place without ratification by Parliament is illegal*

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