

PRESS STATEMENT

**For Immediate Release
To All Media Agencies**

**“TIME TO SOUND THE ALARM ON ESCALATING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN
GHANA’S MINING COMMUNITIES”**

Accra, October 16, 2026

Ghana’s gold sector remains a major pillar of the national economy. As Africa’s largest gold producer and a leading source of export earnings, foreign exchange and government revenue, gold offers significant and increasing prospects for national development, jobs and public services. These prospects are ever increasing and welcome. But they must not be built on the destruction of communities, the poisoning of rivers, the displacement of farmers, or the silencing of citizens.

Across Ghana’s mining-affected communities, people are losing more than land. They are losing access to water, livelihoods and, increasingly, the freedom to speak out without fear of intimidation.

We are deeply concerned by the growing pattern of threats, harassment, land encroachment and environmental destruction we are documenting in communities affected by illegal and unregulated mining. Farmers are being pushed off their lands, water sources are being polluted, access routes to farms are being destroyed, and residents who challenge mining operations are being threatened into silence.

This is not a new crisis. It is the latest chapter in a long and painful history. Over a century of gold mining in Ghana has not transformed the economy or lifted mining communities out of poverty. As the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) found in its landmark 2008 nationwide investigation, a verification mission to mining communities “confirmed some of the reports of widespread violent abuses of human rights by mining company officials and their security contractors,” and that “the causes of the violations of human rights appear systemic in nature”. CHRAJ documented harassment and inhumane treatment, including alleged illegal miners and innocent community members being abused by security personnel.

The Norwegian Council on Ethics, in its June 27, 2012 recommendation, found an “unacceptable risk that the company’s operations may cause severe environmental damage and contribute to serious or systematic human rights violations” at AngloGold Ashanti’s Obuasi and Iduapriem mines in Ghana. The Council noted that “the greatest future risk now in the area of human rights seems primarily to be linked to the extensive pollution problems,” which are “both widespread and complex”.

Large-scale mining continues to drive displacement and abuse. The Electrochem Ghana salt mining project in Ada East District has sparked allegations of widespread human rights abuses, threats of violence and fatalities, with over 10,000 salt farmers facing eviction from their ancestral lands amid ongoing parliamentary and CHRAJ investigations. The contested lands along the Songor Lagoon are home to more than 20 communities whose livelihoods and cultural identity are deeply intertwined with sustainable salt production. A 2024 study across seven regions confirmed that both large-scale and artisanal mining have contributed to forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, health issues and gender disparities. Residents reported respiratory issues, skin diseases and health complications from toxic exposure, and complained of assault, dismissal from work and shooting incidents without compensation.

Small-scale and galamsey mining have created a parallel crisis. Approximately 21% of children aged 5 to 17 are in child labour, many in dangerous mining processes and exposed to toxic substances such as mercury, in violation of ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour. The UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries observed with concern the activities of small-scale illegal miners, noting that “a number of them are armed” and that the delegation “heard reports of violence associated with mechanized illegal mining,” including “armed illegal miners attacking and shooting unarmed mine security personnel”. Women and girls are being trafficked and exploited in illegal mining communities, lured with promises of legitimate jobs but ending up in “exploitative labour and commercial sexual exploitation,” including debt bondage, confiscation of travel documents and oath-swearing to instil fear. Around 60% of Ghana’s water bodies have been contaminated with toxic substances like mercury and cyanide, with illegal mining being a primary contributor to this environmental degradation.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, Marcos Orellana, following his 2022 visit to Ghana, stated unequivocally: “Mercury use in small-scale mining is contaminating soils and water sources at a national scale, compromising the rights of present and future generations”. According to the Special Rapporteur, “medical studies have found that children living near mining areas often have elevated levels of mercury in their body and sometimes suffer from symptoms of mercury poisoning,” and that “in Ghana, the vast majority of artisanal and small-scale gold mines rely on mercury”. Health clinics do not inform people about the risks connected with mercury, let alone test or treat children for mercury poisoning. The Special Rapporteur warned that “weak implementation of laws concerning chemicals and wastes at the national level” puts individuals at risk of serious human rights violations. This is not a distant threat; it is a present and escalating public health emergency affecting entire communities, particularly women and children.

Through our work on Business and Human Rights in the extractive sector under the Building Resilient and Active Communities in Extractive Landscapes in Ghana (BRACE) Project, we have documented cases across several mining communities that point to a

wider and deeply troubling pattern. These are not isolated incidents. They raise serious questions about the protection of community rights and the failure of duty-bearers to prevent abuses and hold those responsible to account.

We cannot accept a situation where communities are expected to surrender their land, livelihoods, water and safety in the name of mining. These abuses must stop, and those responsible, including any public officials found to have enabled them, must be held accountable. The unchecked expansion of galamsey has stripped families of their farmlands and livelihoods, contaminated the rivers and streams on which entire communities depend for drinking water and irrigation, and exposed farmers, women and youth to harassment and violence for simply defending their land. This is not mere negligence. It reflects a systemic failure and, in some instances, apparent complicity on the part of authorities mandated to protect these communities.

Among the cases we have documented, the experiences of communities in Kuano, Dome, Abobri and Akyensa in the Ayensuano District of the Eastern Region demonstrate the importance of community empowerment in protecting land rights and promoting accountability in the extractive sector. Mining operators, reportedly acting under a so-called “cooperative mining” arrangement said to be facilitated by the District Chief Executive (DCE) for Ayensuano, attempted to enter community lands without the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of affected residents. However, through the empowerment and mobilisation efforts of community paralegals and the Community Resource Management Area (CREMA), community members were equipped to understand their rights and resist the arrangement rather than submit to an initiative they had not consented to. Their response demonstrates the critical role of community-led action in challenging mining arrangements that proceed without the consent of affected residents. The alleged involvement of the DCE in facilitating this arrangement raises important questions about the role of public officials in protecting community rights, respecting FPIC, and ensuring that mining activities follow lawful procedures. These concerns warrant appropriate scrutiny to establish the facts and ensure accountability where wrongdoing is proven.

We stress that Ayensuano is not an isolated case. It is one entry point into a much wider national pattern of encroachment, pollution and intimidation, a pattern borne out by our documentation of similar cases elsewhere and one that demands urgent, coordinated action. Our field documentation reveals how far this crisis has spread.

In Kuntokrom, near Dunkwa-on-Offin, galamsey operators have destroyed access paths leading to farmlands, including those farmed by Joyce Alabar and others, leaving harvested produce to rot on the farms with no way to bring it out. The open pits left behind by these mining operations have also cut communities off from one another. Farmers who set out for their farms are unable to return home, effectively trapped by the very land that once sustained them. This is the same district where, on June 27, 2010, an illegal gold mine collapsed after heavy rains, burying an estimated 100

people. The BBC reported that “at least 15 people have survived but there are fears that about 100 people could have been buried when the pit collapsed”. This lethal history remains unaddressed.

In Kenyasi No. 2, illegal mining is destroying the Densu River, the community’s only water source. The case has been reported to the Traditional Authorities, who say they have in turn reported it to the police. Yet nothing has been done, and the perpetrators continue to operate with impunity. Farmers who visit the site face threats and intimidation, with miners reportedly firing warning shots to prevent them from confronting the operation.

In Nsuaem No. 1, wastewater discharged from illegal mining sites has been released directly into cocoa farms, cutting off access and destroying harvests. Cocoa farmers are being locked out of the very land on which their livelihoods depend.

On September 29, 2026, we submitted a formal criminal complaint to the District Police Commander, Konongo, and requested an urgent investigation into an incident at Patriensa in the Ashanti Region. The complaint follows a video that circulated widely on social media showing a distressed 61-year-old cocoa farmer being chased from her farm by a man brandishing a cutlass. Since the video emerged, we have established that it was recorded by the farmer’s son, who was present. Our investigations show that a group of persons entered the land and began mining without the farm owner’s knowledge or consent, and that portions of the cocoa farm were cleared and destroyed. A coalition of civil society organisations, including A Rocha Ghana, the Nature and Development Foundation, WACAM, and the Network of Legal Advocates for Land and Human Rights, has formally called on the Ghana Police Service to urgently investigate cases of intimidation, threats and destruction of farmlands in galamsey-affected communities.

These are not mere infractions. They are flagrant violations of Ghana’s legal and policy commitments on land, the environment and human rights, including the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703), the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1994 (Act 490), and Ghana’s National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. These violations also run contrary to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which place a duty on business enterprises to avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts, and on the State to protect against such abuse by third parties through effective policies, legislation and adjudication. The UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights has noted that challenges faced in Ghana’s mining communities include “forced displacement, encroachment onto family lands (including cemeteries and burial grounds), attacks, the use of force against community members, and pollution of water sources”.

The continental context makes this even more urgent. Allegations of human rights abuses linked to transition mineral extraction across Africa climbed from 45 cases in

2024 to 100 in 2025, a 122% increase, according to the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre's Transition Minerals Tracker 2026. Attacks on human rights and environmental defenders rose by more than 50% in the same period, with 42 of the 329 global allegations involving attacks on defenders. Reports indicate that in October 2026, at least 72 civilians prospecting for gold were killed in air strikes on the Egypt-Sudan border, a stark reminder of the extreme violence that can attend unregulated gold prospecting in Africa. Emergency Lawyers stated that "the deliberate targeting of unarmed civilians violates international humanitarian law and the right to life" and that "these acts may constitute war crimes".

Ghana's documented cases are part of this wider escalation, driven by weak safeguards that leave communities and defenders increasingly vulnerable.

We demand immediate action. We call on:

- District Assemblies and District Chief Executives across all mining-affected districts, including Ayensuano, to immediately account for their role in facilitating "cooperative mining" or similar arrangements, and to permanently halt any further coercion or forced entry into community lands pending independent investigation;
- The Minerals Commission and the Environmental Protection Authority to urgently investigate and shut down illegal mining activities in affected communities nationwide, and enforce full compliance with licensing, environmental permitting and reclamation obligations;
- The Ghana Police Service and relevant security agencies must be proactively responsive to communities at the intersection of risks and exposure to the activities of irresponsible mining by both legal and illegal actors.
- Our security agencies must prosecute those responsible for threats and acts of intimidation against community members and land and environmental defenders in mining-affected communities across the country, and to end the impunity with which these attacks are currently carried out;
- The government must adequately resource the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to effectively investigate these violations without delay and ensure access to justice and remedy for aggrieved communities and individuals.
- The government must, as a matter of urgency, take steps to reclaim abandoned pits and restore safe passage where mining has cut off farmers and communities from their farms and from each other, as documented in Kuntokrom and other affected communities;
- Government to ensure that affected farmers and communities nationwide receive fair and prompt compensation and remediation for destroyed farmlands and polluted water sources, in line with the polluter-pays principle;

- All duty-bearers, at both national and district level, to uphold free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) as a non-negotiable precondition for any mining-related activity affecting community land;
- All mining companies, both large-scale and small-scale, to conduct human rights due diligence, respect community rights, and refrain from any action that displaces, pollutes, intimidates, or exploits;
- Individuals and communities affected by land encroachment, destruction of farms, pollution of water bodies, threats, intimidation or other human rights violations linked to mining to reach out to us. As part of our work under the BRACE Project, we are documenting the experiences of mining-affected communities to help bring these violations to public attention, strengthen accountability and advocate for the protection of community rights. If you or your community has experienced similar violations, we encourage you to contact our team and share your experience. Your voice matters, and documenting these experiences can help us build a clearer picture of the scale and nature of these abuses across Ghana.

We remain committed to working with affected communities, local government and state institutions across Ghana to ensure that the extractive sector operates within a framework that respects human rights, protects the environment, and safeguards the safety and livelihoods of Ghanaians.

We will continue to monitor, document and escalate cases such as those in Ayensuano District, Kuntokrom, Kenyasi No. 2, Nsuaem No. 1, amongst others, through every legal and advocacy channel available to us under the BRACE and BIVA Projects.

This is a national emergency, and it demands nothing less than a decisive national response now, not later.

End

Signed

A Rocha Ghana

For more information, please contact
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