

GHANA INSTITUTE OF FORESTERS (GIF)

PHONE: + 233 (0) 208318665
+ 233 (0) 302405663
FAX : + 233 (0) 30 2400768



POST OFFICE BOX AH 4
ACHIMOTA
ACCRA, GHANA

Email: info@gifor.org

OUR REF:

DATE: 12 September, 2024

PRESS RELEASE: **HALT MINING IN FOREST RESERVES**

1. In the wake of the public outcry following the recent exposé by the Ghana Water Company, Multimedia and other entities on the devastating impacts of gold mining on our water bodies and forests, the Ghana Institute of Foresters (GIF) applauds Organized Labour and the Ghanaian populace for the immense concern shown for Ghana's threatened water and forest resources and the bold requests made for Government to address the situation.
2. It is important to note that this is not the first time that calls have been made on the Government to take the necessary steps to address mining associated destruction to our water bodies and forests. The Ghana Institute of Foresters has made multiple Press Releases to highlight the devastating impacts of unregulated mining on our forests and called on Government to address the situation. Erastus Asare Donkor of the Multimedia Group has been consistent in his exposition of the devastating impacts of mining activities on our water and forest resources and called on Government to address the situation. A Rocha Ghana and other Civil Society Organizations have done a lot of work to draw attention to the devastating impacts of mining on our water and forest resources and called on Government to address the situation. It is sad that after all these calls over the years, Government has not done enough to address the menace, landing us in the current scale of destruction to our water and forest resources.
3. As specified in Section 2(d) of the Forest Act, 1927 (Cap 157), our forest reserves were deliberately established for purposes that include safeguarding water supplies, sustaining ecological integrity and the forest microclimate needed for cocoa production, and sustaining supply of timber. The reserves have been legally dedicated as protected areas, which confers on them legal protection from destructive use. Allowing mining in our forest reserves defeats the purposes of the forest reservation. It makes it unjustified to continue having them as areas entrusted to Government to manage with its powers and expertise for the benefit of all Ghanaians and generations unborn.
4. The forest destruction happening now through mining is akin to what happened in the 1960/1970 when many forest reserves were cleared for cocoa farms and we looked on unconcerned. The impacts of our inaction are manifesting in several ways.

5. No running water is now safe for drinking in most parts of Ghana. Consequently, many people are using bottled or sachet water and the retail price per litre is at par with petrol. This is a huge economic cost. There are rising incidences of diseases many of which were unknown when our sources of water were unpolluted and forests intact. We are yet to understand how this is contributing to deaths and general health budget.
6. The ability of the forest to provide the known benefits depends on how well the forest ecosystem functions which is also dependent of the size and condition of the forest. Our current forest reserve area is far below the minimum 10% of the total land area targeted for environmental protection.
7. Before the passage of L.I. 2462, an administrative framework for mining permitted limited mining of not more than 2% of timber production reserves. The blatant abuse of this limited provision led to calls to totally ban mining in forest reserves. Some companies illegally mined in forest reserves under the guise of gold prospecting. Some entities mined in forest reserves with no permit whatsoever. The Government responded favourably to the concerns in 2021 with an Executive ban on all mining activities in forest reserves, including a ban on the issuance of forest entry permits and prospecting licenses. Some pieces of mining equipment not removed from forest reserves by a given date were destroyed. Just when the GIF and other entities were calling for investigation into the issuance of the gold prospecting licenses when the Executive ban was still in place, we received a bigger shock that L.I. 2462 has been passed in November 2022 that legally permits unlimited mining in forest reserves. Not even the ecologically-sensitive Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas have been spared. The GIF was completely left in the dark throughout the processes leading the passage of L.I. 2462.
8. Though presented as seeking to regulate mining in forest reserves, L.I. 2462 has opened the floodgates for institutionalized mining in our forest reserves. Barely a year after its passage, twelve forest reserve mining leases have been issued, and 14 mining leases are at various stages of approval by the Minerals Commission. This is very worrying. It is important to note that about 80% of the approved forest reserve mining leases are for alluvial mining, which are incompatible with forestry as a land use option. Currently, 37 forest reserves have been impacted by mining activities, with the severely impacted reserves including Uppaw Wassaw, Apamprama Forest Reserve, Oda River Forest Reserve, Subin Shelterbelt Forest Reserve, Asenanyo River Forest Reserve, etc.
9. Our foresters have risked their lives in their effort to protect our forest reserves from illegal miners. Indeed, since 2023, our foresters have successfully destroyed 154 excavators found illegally operating in our forest reserves and arrested over 600 persons involved in illegal mining within forest reserves. The arrests made in the first two quarters of 2024 (over 400 persons) exceed those arrested in 2023. These gallant efforts have not been able to completely stop illegal mining in our forest reserves because the foresters have sometimes had to face heavily-armed miners linked to influential persons and entities that the foresters are not able to overpower. Forest reserves like Desiri (near Tepa), Subri River (at Daboase) and Asenanyo

River (at Nyinahin) have become ‘no go’ areas for our foresters due to the threat of bodily harm or death by armed marauding gangs protecting illegal miners in these forests.

10. Against these developments, we join Organized Labour to demand immediate actions from the following institutions

A. The President, Government and Legislature of the Republic:

- I. Declaration of State of Emergency that incorporates;
 - i. an order to ban all forms of alluvial mining (legal or illegal) in forest reserves and around water bodies.
 - ii. Immediate evacuation of all mining equipment in forest reserves and around water bodies.
 - iii. The deployment of the Police and Military to support the Forestry Commission in immobilising all mining equipment used in alluvial mining around river bodies and forest reserves and setting up joint security checkpoints at strategic locations to protect our forest reserves.
 - iv. Resourcing, retooling and empowerment of the Forestry Commission to be able to discharge its duties and rid our forest reserves of illegal miners.
- II. The immediate repeal and revocation of all laws that are inimical to the protection and management of our reserved areas
 - i. Legislative Instrument (LI) 2462 and the withdrawal of all licenses granted for prospecting and mining in forests and protected reserves (including GSBA) and around water bodies.
 - ii. Executive Instrument (EI) 234 that de-reserved about one-third of the Achimota Forest Reserve. The government should desist from setting bad precedence for de-reserving reserved lands.

B. The Chief Justice and the Judiciary:

The judiciary should expedite cases of illegal mining brought before the courts to sustain the gains made in addressing the menace. Currently, 850 illegal miners' cases are pending before the courts. In some instances, Chinese illegal miners are released due to a lack of interpreters. We call for the urgent allocation of resources to these courts to enable them to expedite the illegal mining cases brought before them.

The 11 September 2024 Press Release by the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources in response to the public outcry does not adequately address the concerns and will not solve the issues at stake. We strongly support the call for mass civil action if the Government fails to take decisive action to address the concerns raised by the end of September 2024. Indeed, this is the only Ghana we have. We must defend our forests and water resources from the greedy economic interests of a few.

END

Signed

**FORESTER DR. ABUKARI NANTOGMAH ATTAH ESQ
PRESIDENT, GHANA INSTITUTE OF FORESTERS**