



Forestry Commission

Our Ref:.....

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FORESTRY COMMISSION

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REJOINDER

Re: Forests Under Siege – Apamprama Forest Reserve

The attention of the Forestry Commission has been drawn to a Joy News hotline documentary on alleged illegal mining activities in the Apamprama Forest Reserve, aired yesterday evening, 4th September 2023. We thank the Multimedia Group for shining the light on the destruction of a large portion of this once lush forest reserve and an important watershed, through illegal mining. We believe such documentaries help draw attention to grave national issues where public support is urgently required to address. It is, however, important to put matters in proper perspective for the sake of the public.

The Apamprama Forest Reserve was duly constituted in 1952 and it covers an area of approximately 35km². Illegal alluvial gold mining has been ongoing for several decades along the banks of the Oda River that flows through the reserve. Since 2013, however, there have been incidents of illegal mining with heavy equipment (excavators) in this Forest Reserve, leading to the arrest of three (3) Chinese nationals and one (1) Ghanaian that year. The estimated area affected was reported to be about 3 hectares.

Again, on 1st February 2016, eight (8) persons including five (5) Chinese were arrested for engaging in illegal mining in the reserve, and two (2) excavators being used by the illegal miners seized (Graphic Online Feb. 01, 2016; Myjoyonline Feb. 01, 2016). Thereafter, there have been a series of illegal mining in the reserve with some arrests effected by the Forestry Commission.

It will be recalled that at a recent Meet-the-Press, held at the Ministry of Information on 2nd May 2023, the Forestry Commission (FC) reported that 34 forest reserves across the country have suffered incidences of illegal gold mining, and that apart from three (3) of these reserves where the FC had challenges in dealing with the situation, the other 31 reserves were fairly under the control of the FC, notwithstanding occasional incursions by illegal miners. The Apamprama Forest Reserve, is one of the three (3) forest reserves where the Commission had challenges due to the associated violence exhibited by the armed perpetrators, in addition to the Oda River and Subin Shelterbelt forest reserves.

With the support of military personnel from the Southern Command, illegal miners were flushed out from these three forest reserves between May and July 2023. During this period five excavators and 1 bulldozer equipment were seized, with one (1) excavator burnt in the Apamprama forest reserve. Additionally, an unspecified number of other

mining equipment and wooden structures used by the illegal miners were also destroyed in these 3 forest reserves.

It is important to note that the Forestry Commission has employed a number of strategies and interventions aimed, ultimately, at curbing illegal mining in forest reserves. These include:

1. the training of 964 frontline field officers of the Commission by the military to boost law enforcement. Some of these trainees currently form the nucleus of the FC's Rapid Response Teams (RRT) that supports the fight against illegal mining and other forest offences within forest reserves;
2. the procurement of one thousand (1000) pump action guns to boost morale and capacity of frontline staff to protect forest reserves;
3. the seizure and decommissioning of equipment used for illegal mining in forest reserves. Since January this year, three (3) excavators have been seized and over seventy (70) excavators, unspecified number of generators, water pumping machines and other mining equipment and temporary wooden structures have been burnt within forest reserves mainly in the Bekwai, Bibiani, Enchi, Juaboso and Tarkwa forest districts by the Forest Services Division with support of the RRTs. Out of the total number of burnt excavators twelve (12) were burnt in the Apamprama Forest Reserve;
4. the arrest and prosecution of illegal miners, both Ghanaians and foreigners. Many of these people have been convicted, while the trials of others are pending in various courts across the country;
5. the intensification of surveillance, intelligence gathering, and monitoring of illegal mining activities in forest reserves to ensure early detection and arrest of perpetrators;
6. the training of Forestry Commission staff to prosecute forest offences. So far, thirty (30) management staff of the Commission have been trained as prosecutors by the Office of the Attorney General;
7. stakeholder engagements and education on the adverse effects of illegal mining on the environment, to garner public support to fight this menace.
8. reclamation exercises to reclaim degraded reserves. Currently, under the Forest Investment Programme, the Forestry Commission and other partners are carrying out pilot reclamation and revegetation of mined out areas within forest reserves in the Bekwai and Bibiani Forest Districts. Apamprama and other illegally mined forest reserves are in line to be tackled following lessons learnt from our ongoing pilot projects; and

9. aggressive reforestation drive led by government through the Forestry Commission and private sector to help restore degraded landscapes and protect important watersheds, while mitigating the effects of climate change. Since 2017 over 750,000 hectares of deforested and degraded landscapes have been brought under restoration through forest plantation development, enrichment planting and trees-on-farm (agro-forestry). The Modified Taungya model of forest plantation development, which incorporates food cropping during the initial two to three years, produces on the average over 100,000 metric tonnes of food crops (plantain, cocoyam, maize, vegetables, legumes, etc.) annually. The various forest landscape restoration activities across the country led by the FC generates an estimated 80,000 jobs within forest-fringe communities annually.

As a public regulator, charged with the protection and sustainable management of Ghana's forest and wildlife resources, we are deeply concerned about incidents of illegal mining in forest reserves. The fight against illegal mining has been arduous and multifaceted, but we continue to adopt measures aimed at coming to grips with this menace. It has serious socio-economic linkages and therefore needs to be tackled holistically. We also believe that such onslaught on the environment is an existential threat and so we have no choice but to do all in our power to address it. We, therefore, call on our traditional leaders and the general public to support the Forestry Commission by providing information on illegal mining in their communities and environs so that the Commission can act swiftly to deal with situations before or when they arise.

The Commission is working with other agencies to provide sustainable alternative livelihood options, especially within communities where illegal mining takes place, to address the issue of youth unemployment and poverty. We are also looking to secure support to augment key logistical requirements, especially operational vehicles, drones, etc. to improve our operational and law enforcement capabilities and to enable the FC respond appropriately to this existential threat. Together we will win this war.

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