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RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN GHANA

PRESS RELEASE

TO ALL PRESS HOUSES

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WE MUST END GALAMSEY TO SAVE OUR COUNTRY

For many years now, our Sovereign Country Ghana has been witnessing, under our very naked eyes, the saddest "environmental coup d'état" ever unleashed upon our nation, heralding a programmed and complete "ecological disaster" or destruction.

The Religious Leaders in Ghana: (Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, Office of the National Chief Imam and Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Ghana, National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches and others), are deeply concerned about the devastation that illegal mining (galamsey) has caused and continue to cause our nation, and the associate negative health and socio-economic effects on our country now and in the future.

Visible Destruction of Galamsey and its Devastating Effects

On our various pastoral and social visits to our people in their localities, as well as our many travels across the country, we see, denounce and cry over the wicked and greedy destruction of our forest resources. Cutting down of cash crops on a massive scale, degrading of our land (soils), and polluting our river and water bodies with mining chemicals like mercury, chlorine, and cyanide thereby killing aquatic life including fishes.

TOGETHER WE SOW AND REAP

Our eco-systems are being destroyed irreversibly; our soils are contaminated with poisonous chemicals, which are very difficult if not impossible to clean them up. Our people are drinking dangerously polluted water (some of our Mission Hospitals are recording increased strange

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diseases. Some women are reportedly being treated for increased cases of cervical and uterus cancers, others, including men and children are being diagnosed with kidney diseases, the rate of stillbirths is on the high and the annual average turbidity values of rivers and other fresh water bodies affected by galamsey activities is very alarming). The impoundment of water for galamsey activities has over the years caused high incidence and prevalence of buruli ulcers in a number of mining areas results from infection with *Mycobacterium ulcerans*, a slow-growing toxin producer that is found in aquatic habitats.

The deleterious impacts on our food and cash crops are so bad that some countries like Japan requires extra testing of our cocoa products before they can be accepted on their markets. The European Union recently threatened to place an embargo on some of our agricultural products and we are not certain about the future, which already looks gloomy.

Marine life, our livestock, birds, insects and game reserves all depend on, drink and use these highly polluted waters also. Their meat and edible vegetation all end upon our dining tables. We have become "living-dead-polluted-walking Ghanaians." we need to rise up and confront the situation to save our nation.

We wish to remind Ghanaians of our mandate to keep the environment and be responsible stewards of same (Genesis 2:15). We therefore call on individuals, civil society, religious and traditional institutions and all other well-meaning Ghanaians to stand up to the challenge and work to preserve our environment from the menace of galamsey. We admonish opinion leaders and the youth in our communities to speak up and report illegal mining activities in their localities to the relevant authorities. We also urge our pastors and other faith leaders to use their pulpits to preach against evils of galamsey in our country.

We do appreciate President Akufo Addo's call to end galamsey, but the facts of the results of his government's efforts on the ground indicate that more can and ought to be done. We believe that Parliamentarians, Ministers of State, Municipal Chief Executives, District Chief Executives, Assemblymen and women and other government agents in the localities cannot claim ignorance of the people who are involved in galamsey and the places where these detestable acts are carried out.

A recent documentary produced by the Multimedia Group and previous documentaries on galamsey has shown how some law enforcement agents provide security and protection for the illegal miners instead of protecting the interest of Ghana. This is the time to put Ghana first, beyond political party affiliations and personal gains in order to secure a better future for our children, this is the whole basis of sustainable development. The adverse impacts of galamsey are seriously undermining our collective national efforts to achieve our sustainable development goals.

Traditionally, our Chiefs and Queens hold the ancestral lands in trust for their citizens. As custodians of our lands and cultural heritage, they are spiritually bound to protect the lands inherited from their predecessors.

Unfortunately, some Traditional Leaders, are also responsible for allowing such ecological destructions in their jurisdictions. We call on such leaders to desist from this illegality and use their authority to ban galamsey in their domains to avoid further destruction of our natural resources. We, however, wish to commend those traditional Chiefs who have courageously resisted galamsey practices in their territories for which reason there is no single mining activity allowed in some parts of Ghana.

One major threat of galamsey to our country is that it has prevented many youths from going to school. Even though we may not see the immediate negative implication of this, it will definitely have an adverse impact on the economy and peace of our nation in the near future.

It is our prayer and hope that Ghanaians will stand up against galamsey and preserve our environment from further destruction. To this end, we believe that certain actions ought to be taken immediately to end the menace of galamsey in our country.

Action Points

Having visited a number of affected Galamsey communities in our country and having seen the level of devastation that the practice has caused our natural resources, we seek to draw the attention of Ghanaians to the following:

1. We are calling for a week of fasting and prayers to pray for change of hearts and for God's mercy upon our nation for the destruction we have caused the environment.
2. We call for the IMMEDIATE BAN of all small-scale mining. We have taken notice that many groups or companies hide behind a legal license to wreak havoc to the environment. To that end, we call for an immediate ban on all forms of small-scale mining, whether licensed or not, until a workable and satisfactory road map has been established to ensure responsible mining in our country.
3. We call for an immediate national stakeholder's dialogue under the auspices of religious leaders (while the ban is in place) to dialogue with all political parties, mining technocrats, the media, traditional leaders and all stakeholders to commit to a nonpartisan National Strategy to sustainably deal with this national canker before we sink as a nation.

4. We call on government to swiftly arrest and prosecute all those involved in galamsey activities in Ghana without fear or favour, to serve as deterrent to others. Those who desire to be rich at the expense of the future of our country should face the full rigors of the law.
5. With immediate effect, we call on religious leaders to wear red armband to show our deep concern for the destruction of our environment through galamsey.
6. We call for the arrest and immediate prosecution of any chief who permits galamsey activities within his jurisdiction for any reason.
7. We give an ULTIMATUM to MMDCEs in the country to ensure that water bodies that have been polluted because of illegal mining activities within their sphere of governance are clean by June 30, 2023. The Religious Leaders in the country are ready to mobilise our legal team to go to court on this matter and have MMDCEs who have allowed such menace in their jurisdiction to be removed from office.
8. We have realised that galamsey is preventing the youth from going to school. We call on all well-meaning Ghanaians to immediately report any child of school going age who is involved in galamsey activities in their communities to the appropriate authorities and also to their respective religious leaders.

We assure the citizenry of our nation that we are committed to leading a sustained national moral crusade and public education in partnership with all other stakeholders in our various Churches and Mosques across the country to appeal to the moral conscience of Ghanaians for a change of attitude towards the environment.

God bless our homeland Ghana and make us great and strong.

For and on behalf of the Religious Bodies

Christian Council of Ghana.....

Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference.....

Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council.....

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Office of the National Chief Imam

Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Ghana.....

National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches.....