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PRESS STATEMENT BY THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (GCBC) ON ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND THE MENACE OF ILLEGAL MINING – “GALAMSEY”

“Protecting Our Common Home: A Call to End Environmental Degradation through Illegal Mining – Galamsey”

Introduction

We, the Archbishops and Bishops, of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) have, over the years, specifically, since 2009, been consistently vocal about the environmental degradation caused by illegal mining, particularly the phenomenon of "galamsey" (illegal small-scale mining), which has unleashed devastating consequences on our country's ecosystems, water bodies, and communities.

The Conference is deeply concerned about the persistent and alarming levels of environmental degradation caused by such activities.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls on all people to care for our common home, the Earth. As stewards of creation, we have a moral responsibility to safeguard the environment for current and future generations. However, the indiscriminate activities of illegal miners continue to undermine this responsibility (*Laudato Si*, 2015).

Previous Communiqués

We recall our previous communiques (2009, 2010, 2015, 2016-2023) that have dealt thematic areas such as **"The Scourge of galamsey: A Threat to Our Nation's Future"**; **"Galamsey: A Call to Conscience and Action"**; **"Protecting Our Environment, Protecting Our Future"** and **"We must end galamsey to save our Country"**, just to list a few. (Please find the link to all the statements made by the Conference on galamsey since 2009 <https://www.cbcggha.org/index.php/communiques>). These statements demonstrate our longstanding commitment as Conference to addressing this menace. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved, and we must continue to sound the alarm. 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 decry the wicked and greedy destruction of our forest resources.

Areas of Concern

Destruction of Water Bodies: Illegal mining has polluted several of our rivers, such as the Pra, Ankobra, Densu, Tano, Offin and Birim, rendering them undrinkable and unfit for agricultural and domestic use.

We have noted sadly through the recent press statement from the Ghana Water Company Limited, the average turbidity of 14,000 NTU, instead of the recommended 2,000 NTU in the Pra river. This has negatively impacted the livelihoods of farmers and rural communities who depend on these water bodies.

Loss of Agricultural Lands and Crops: Vast stretches of arable land, cocoa farms and other crops have been destroyed by illegal mining activities, reducing the nation's ability to produce food and threatening food security. This loss of farmland is particularly harmful to small-scale farmers who depend on their land for survival.

Health Risks: The use of harmful chemicals such as mercury in illegal mining poses significant health risks, particularly for miners and surrounding communities. These chemicals contaminate water sources and food supplies, leading to long-term health complications, including respiratory and neurological disorders, increase in renal and kidney diseases. How can we, for instance, justify the rise in stillbirths, physical and biological deformities in new born babies caused by such an unscrupulous and selfish enterprise?

Weak Enforcement of Laws: Despite the existence of environmental protection laws, their enforcement has been weak and inconsistent. Corruption, complicity of political leaders, chiefs, and the lack of political will have further exacerbated the problem, allowing illegal mining to thrive unchecked. We wish to state that Ghanaians can no longer tolerate the lip service of government in fighting galamsey.

Call to Action

We acknowledge the activism so far by the Media Coalition Against Galamsey, some of our Chiefs who barred and outlawed galamsey activities in their traditional areas and call on all other stakeholders, including the government, legislature, judiciary, media, civil society, chiefs and religious leaders, to unite in the fight against illegal mining and environmental degradation. We urge the following:

Immediate and Decisive Action by Government: We urge government to stop the lip service in fighting galamsey by employing all available means to halt illegal mining activities. This includes enforcing existing laws, holding perpetrators accountable, and ensuring that those involved in illegal mining face the full force of the law without fear or favour.

Education and Awareness Campaigns: We call on the media, civil society organizations, and religious bodies to amplify education and awareness campaigns on the devastating effects of illegal mining. Communities must be empowered to understand the long-term consequences of galamsey.

Restoration of Affected Areas: We urge the government to prioritize the reclamation of destroyed lands and the restoration of polluted water bodies. This process must involve local communities, led by the Chiefs and be transparent to ensure the recovery of the environment. We recommend strongly, a temporal moratorium on all licensed community mining activities.

Promoting Sustainable Mining Practices: While mining remains an important part of Ghana's economy, it must be carried out responsibly and sustainably. We call on mining companies, both large-scale and small-scale, to adhere strictly to environmental regulations and to adopt practices that protect the environment.

Support for Alternative Livelihood Programmes: Many of those engaged in illegal mining do so out of economic desperation. We urge the government to invest in alternative livelihood programmes that provide sustainable employment opportunities for these individuals, particularly in agriculture and other sectors.

Political Campaign Against Galamsey: We strongly urge all Presidential and Parliamentary Candidates to make public commitments against galamsey in their ongoing political campaigns and call on their followers to follow suit. Say NO to galamsey!

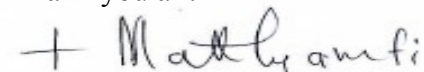
Conclusion

As a Church, we remain committed to promoting social justice and the protection of the environment. We cannot stand by while our environment, which is a gift from God, is destroyed by greed and indifference. The time for action is now. This injustice must stop now. Galamsey is a crime of ecocide which cannot and must not go unpunished.

We call on all Ghanaians to join hands in this noble cause to preserve our environment, protect the dignity of human life, and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come. We urge all politicians to desist from politicising this grave national crisis. Let us rise up to protect our common home!

May God bless our Homeland Ghana and cause us to resist the sins and crimes against our environment.

Thank you all.



**MOST REV. MATTHEW KWASI GYAMFI
BISHOP OF SUNYANI & PRESIDENT OF THE
GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE**

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2024