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PRESS RELEASE
MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATIONS
NANA ADDO DANQUAH AKUFO-ADDO – PRESIDENT-ELECT

Accra, 20th December, 2016. Forest Watch Ghana (FWG), a civil society network of over 35 CSOs and individuals, extends sincere congratulations to you on your election as President of the Republic of Ghana. We also congratulate the people of Ghana for demonstrating strong credentials in democratic consolidation.

Mr. President-elect, you are inheriting the forestry sector which suffers many challenges. Among them are illegal logging and illegal mining which are driven by corruption, weak law enforcement and poor governance.

Illegal mining is perhaps the most serious threat to Ghana's forest and it seems there is no solution in sight. What has been most disturbing not only to us, but also to professional foresters, is the upsurge in the granting of prospecting licences into forest reserves. As a result of this development, areas classified as Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas (GSBA) have been opened up for mining. This is alarming because Ghana loses an area the size of 7.4 football fields of forest every hour. At this rate of destruction, the forest and national heritage are doomed. We even have cause to believe that prospecting or mining licences granted to entities in Upper Wassa, Tano Offin, Fure River, Subri, and other forest reserves are questionable because they are not likely to stand the test of legality.

As a coalition of Non-Governmental Organisations in the forestry sector, FWG finds this trend very disturbing not only because of environmental reasons, but also because such activities constitute a huge drain on Ghana's economy. A 2016 Environmental Protection Agency report estimated that environmental degradation costs Ghana 10% of GDP. With an escalation of galamsey and the resultant destruction of forest, rivers, and cocoa farms, this figure could even be much higher.

Mr. President-elect, the last 5 years have also seen an upsurge in the harvesting of rosewood. We have argued that it defies any sound economic or environmental logic.

In your first 100 days, we call on you to halt all prospecting or mining permits in forest reserves granted in the last 2 years. Furthermore, all these permits need to be subjected to investigation or public enquiry for their documented offences. In addition, we believe that a moratorium on

the poor regulated small scale mining sector should be high on your agenda. We also hope you would keep forest reserves closed to mining.

We welcome your support for renewable energy and your opposition to dirty energy like coal power. We kindly urge you to continue the high level political support for implementation of initiatives such as the FLEGT-VPA which aims at addressing illegal logging in Ghana. This initiative was signed in the previous NPP era, and it would be a feather in your cap to issue the first FLEGT licence timber from Ghana. We cannot afford to delay the process any further. Also Ghana has developed a very ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions as part of her contribution to keeping global temperature below plus 2°C. Your political support would be important in realising the objectives.

Additionally, your commitment to the implementation of the Forest and Wildlife Policy, Wood Procurement Policy, the Plantations Strategy and the REDD+ Strategy could significantly secure forest resources for the future.

Knowing your legal credentials, we do expect that you would lead Ghana to comply with all of the international environmental agreements she has signed or acceded to and ratified. Among these are the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, the CITES and the ILO Convention 169.

We also hope you would support the institutional strengthening efforts of the Forestry Commission to minimise or eliminate the unnecessary political interference over forest management.

We, on our part, will continue to offer our constructive contributions to your administration. In collaboration with other environmental NGOs, we are carefully monitoring your promises on the environment. We will hold you to them with fearless honesty. That is the least we can offer as patriots.

Once again we would like to congratulate you on your election to the high office of the President of the Republic of Ghana and wish you all the best.

Signed

Samuel Mensah Mawutor

Co-ordinator, FWG