



PRESS RELEASE

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Sanitizing the Forest Sub-Sector is a good start but...

Hon. John Peter Amewu kindly look deeper

Accra, 15th February, 2017. Civil society organisations, working in the forest sector, commend the new Minister for Lands and Natural Resources for immediately issuing a directive to **restore sanity in the forestry sub-sector.**

The directive, with immediate effect, calls for an action plan to deal with illegal logging, illegal mining and illegal encroachment in forest reserves. It further halts all special permits issued after 10th December, 2016; halts all operations of loggers with expired permits including logging of rosewood; and finally bans all rosewood exports.

We believe this is a good approach to sanitizing a sector which is bedevilled with immense challenges, including endemic corruption, breakdown in professionalism and overbearing negative influence of politicians.

The rosewood situation can best be described as “complete insanity.” Ghana illegally exported rosewood amounting to 10% of the global trade in 2016. The problem keeps escalating as exports in the banned wood continues in flagrant defiance of the previous directives banning rosewood exports. Exports for June 2016 were 467% higher than that of the corresponding period in 2015. A total of more than 9,000 40ft containers bearing 292,000 m³ of rosewood were exported from Ghana to China between January 2014 and June 2016. What is most appalling about this development is that majority of rosewood timber harvested in Ghana originates from the highly sensitive savannah ecosystem, which is prone to desertification.

While Ghana has been making noticeable progress in efforts to reduce illegal logging with the implementation of the FLEGT-VPA and the contribution of many NGOs, the abuse of political power has caused an upsurge in the illegal practice in some parts of Ghana; some forest encroachments have been masterminded by politicians, particularly in parts of the Western Region.

Galamsey activities also continue to threaten the integrity of our forest and land resources everywhere and sadly, it seems resource managers have accepted it. We have looked on with concern the wanton disregard for the forestry laws of Ghana and the ineptitude of the Forestry Commission and law enforcement agencies to bring these illegal activities to a halt. This situation portrays negligence and a lack of commitment to the Service Charter of the Forestry Commission, as well as its own Vision and Mission.

We strongly believe that the abuse of permit allocation in the sector did not begin from December 2016 and therefore if you really want to sanitize the sub-sector you would need

to dig deeper into logging and mining contracts which date some years back. These are some issues which we wish to bring to your attention:

1. We have reason to believe some Timber Utilization Contracts (TUC) and Special Permits issued between 2014 and now (2017) were questionably awarded. We have heard that about 15 new TUCs have been issued since 2014. There is, however, very little information available to allow civil society to effectively play its watchdog role of interrogating and investigating the contract awarding process.
2. Some companies have also been granted questionable mining permits to destroy Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas including Tano Offin, Subri, Upper Wassa, and Fure River forest reserves. In the last two forest reserves, we have observed that these operators have hired muscle-bound armed men to protect their operations. Local communities like Juabo, Sraha in the Upper Denkyria West continue to protest against this. These operations need to be shut down immediately.
3. Again we are aware of the high illegal timber racketeering in Goaso Forest District in the Brong Ahafo Region. The scale of this illegal logging is huge. The illegal loggers operate in broad-day light and with total impunity. Forest managers and their military task forces have been incapacitated as some politicians give backing to this illegal logging. We believe this is one of the biggest illegal logging syndicates in Ghana currently, which must be stopped.
4. We also know that presently, about 30-50 40ft containers of rosewood and other species are harvested from the savannah regions each week. Honorable Minister, this is not an area to encourage logging of any specie because it is prone to desertification. We need a directive barring logging and trade of all forms of timber species including rosewood, ebony, and papao.

As activists in the sector, we believe that to truly sanitize the sub-sector it requires a few more steps to be a game-changer. We therefore recommend the following:

- a. That you request the Inspector General of Police to investigate the sub-sector. Alternatively you may set-up a multi-stakeholder investigation panel, including members of Civil Society. The task would be to investigate the procedure and award of all logging and mining contracts in Ghana since 2013, as well as the rosewood mess; to identify illegalities and accomplices; and recommend actions against such individuals and companies.
- b. That the findings of the Committee should be implemented without prejudice.

We would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister for Lands and Natural Resources and once again laud you for your bold directive. You will find in us, (the NGOs listed below), your strongest ally in working to ensure sustainable use and preservation of our resources for development.

Signed

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List of Supporting Organisations

1. Civic Response - Accra
2. Forest Watch Ghana
3. A Rocha Ghana - Accra
4. Tropenbos Ghana – Kumasi
5. Kachito Community Development Centre – Damongo
6. Juxtapose Integrated Development Association - Salaga
7. Environmental Protection Association of Ghana – Kumasi
8. New Generation Concern – Wassa Akropong
9. Accelerated Rural Development Association – Hohoe
10. Domestic Lumber Trade Association – Accra
11. Rural Development and Youth Empowerment Association – Kumasi
12. The Development Institute – Accra
13. PROMAG Network – Sefwi Wiawso
14. Conservation Foundation – Agona Nkwanta
15. Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development – Accra
16. Rural Environmental Care Association – Tarkwa
17. Institute of Cultural Affairs – Accra
18. Friends of the Earth Ghana – Accra
19. Green Earth Organization – Nsawam
20. Green Globe Society – Ho
21. Nature and Development Foundation - Accra
22. Northern Ghana Network for Development – Tamale
23. Centre for Environmental Impact Analysis (CEIA) – Cape Coast