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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INVESTIGATE FORESTRY COMMISSION'S ALLEGATIONS

Accra, 4th February 2020. We read with absolute horror and regret a news story written by Jonas Nyabor titled, "Powerful people behind 'galamsey' in forest reserves – Forestry Commission" on 28th January, 2020 on citinewsroom.com.

According to the story, the Forestry Commission (FC) says some "unseen powerful persons are behind the resurgence of illegal mining in some forest reserves in the country." The story continues that these "unseen powerful persons" also give illegal miners military protection. As a result, illegal miners carry out their illegal activities with impunity. Sadly, this is not the first time the FC is making such an assertion. On 12th March, 2019, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the FC, Mr. Kwadwo Owusu Afriyie (Sir John), also made a similar shocking allegation on Joy FM during a one-on-one interview dubbed: *unveiling the politics behind galamsey and tree felling*. During this interview, Mr. Owusu Afriyie alleged that there are some people in authority who aid illegal miners to return to mining in forest reserves. This allegation from the CEO of FC came at a time when investigative media house, Tiger Eye PI, had also revealed, through an investigative piece, that some personnel at the presidency through corrupt practices facilitate illegal mining in Ghana.

So we have had two senior officials of the FC reporting about the involvement of "unseen powerful persons" in illegal surface mining in our forest reserves. This is a sad state of affairs for Ghana's forests and spells doom for the nation because while the FC is mandated to protect, develop, manage, and regulate forests and wildlife resources of the country, these assertions from the Commission give the impression that it is no longer in control of Ghana's forests and is, therefore, unable to fulfil its mandate. Just making these statements in no way help in resolving the menace. The FC should name and shame these "unseen powerful persons" to back the revelations from Tiger Eye PI for successful prosecution. What's more? It stands to reason that some of the President's appointees and personnel at the presidency are sabotaging his efforts to fight against illegal mining in the country due to their selfish interests.

As civil society organisations working in the environment and natural resources sector, we believe a campaign against illegal mining is a noble cause, because the fight against illegal mining is one against a major social canker of our time. Given this, we have been supporting the campaign against illegal small-scale mining since its launch, through community sensitization and media engagements. It is, therefore, worrying to hear assertions of such

nature from the FC. These assertions will create doubts in the general public about the President's commitment in fighting against illegal mining.

For these reasons, the President should not ignore the assertions made by the FC. Otherwise CSOs who supported the campaign against illegal mining will feel stabbed in the back and will be disappointed if these allegations are swept under the carpet. Also, the international community who has been praising the President for his commitments to environmental protection will also lose trust in supporting his noble agenda for environmental protection.

Forest Watch Ghana, therefore, calls on the President, His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo to investigate the assertions made by the FC. We suggest that an independent committee be set up to investigate the allegations made by both the FC and Tiger Eye PI in order to identify and punish the perpetrators.

Signed

Albert Katako, Co-ordinator

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