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PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WACAM BEMOANS THE ABSENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ON POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AGENDA

WACAM is deeply concerned about the fact that Environment which should take centre stage of political campaigns is missing in the campaigns of Political Parties.

Ghana is confronted with grave environmental problems which are serious enough to attract the attention of people seeking political office. Unfortunately, aspiring political office holders have not found it important to express commitment to environmental issues.

WACAM recognises that the environment integrates human beings, animals, plants, and rivers etc which form a complex interdependent system. The value orientation of a society as to whether human beings are part of the environment or above the environment would affect how we see environmental destruction. If the environment integrates human beings and all natural wealth, then the destruction of the natural wealth would mean the destruction of human society.

WACAM believes that the environment constitutes an important legacy and each generation of society would be judged on the basis of the responsible stewardship of the environment. Some of the critical environmental issues include but not limited to the rate of depletion of our forests, the integrity of forests reserves, the pollution/destruction of water bodies, waste management and sanitation.

According to the Forestry Commission, in the early part of the 20th Century, Ghana's high forests coverage was estimated at 8.2 million hectares and this has reduced to less than 1.6 million hectares at an annual rate of loss of 65,000 hectares. The annual forest depletion is quantified to be 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Though Ghana is endowed with abundant water resources, freshwater is becoming increasingly unavailable, compelling many people to depend on mineral water which carries with it, the problem of dealing with plastic waste - a huge environmental problem. Individual and corporate bodies have engaged in activities that had polluted and destroyed many water bodies. For example, surface mining activities had destroyed 5 streams in Dumase, 10 streams in Sanso and streams in communities such as Teberebie, Dokyiwa, Fenaso, Adisakrom, and Prestea etc have been destroyed through mining operations

The Fosu Lagoon in Cape Coast which provides the people of Cape Coast and other areas, a sustainable means of livelihood and also helps them to meet their protein needs is described

as polluted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It is therefore not surprising that Ghana is listed among the countries that would experience water stress of 1700 cubic metres or less per person annually by 2025 (Ghanaian Chronicle of July 25, 2003) .

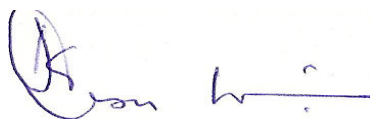
As a nation, we have exhibited fundamentalism in our bid to attract foreign investment to the detriment of environmental concerns to the extent that we have permitted mining in Forest Reserves. The Chirano Gold Mine Limited is mining in the Tano Suraw Forest reserve whilst Newmont is doing everything possible to mine in Ajenua Bepo Forest Reserve which would leave a pit of 2.5km long, 0.9 km wide and about 0.5 km deep partially reclaimed in the Ajenua Bepo Forest Reserve.

Ghana cannot achieve Sustainable Development if we allow the plundering of our natural wealth in a manner that portrays us as bad stewards of the environment. Achieving minimal economic gains at great cost to the environment and other social considerations would not help us achieve long term poverty reduction.

We are disappointed that these important environmental issues have been relegated to the background in the campaign agenda of aspiring political office holders and political parties.

We want to laud the efforts of traditional leaders such as Osagyefo Amoatia Ofori Panin, Okyehene and Osagyefo Oseadeeyo Agyeman Badu II, Dormaahene for their consistent campaigns against environmental degradation. The aspiring political leaders have a lot to learn from the commitment of the aforementioned traditional celebrities who have used indigenous knowledge effectively to advocate for responsible stewardship of the environment.

We call on the Ghanaian electorate to set the campaign agenda for political office holders and demand commitment to environmental issues from political parties and aspiring political office holders.



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(Executive Director)