



**STATEMENT OF THE BISHOP, CLERGY AND LAY FAITHFUL OF THE
DIOCESE OF JASIKAN ON THE INTENTION TO START MINING ACTIVITIES
IN THE OTI REGION**

Recently publicity has been given on the existence of iron ore, gold and lithium deposits in commercial quantities in the Oti and Volta Regions. Particular mention has been made of Bowiri and Akpafu range which, coincidentally has been a forest reserve long before independence.

We, the Bishop, the Clergy, and the Lay Faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Jasikan, and the people living in these areas, received this news with great trepidation. Our trepidation even deepened when it was announced that the mining of this resources will begin in 2023.

Given what has happened and still happening in other parts of the country, where mining of gold in particular has completely destroyed water bodies, cocoa farms, food crops and land masses which are used or could be used for farming or extension of farming, we feel compelled to make a statement on this publicity because we do not want to grieve over the destruction and loss of resources which over the years we use to sustain our livelihood.

- **Remote Motivation**

The remote motivation for our statement is the encyclical, *Laudato si*, published in May 2015 by Pope Francis. The principal focus of this encyclical is the relationship between God, humans and the earth. For us as humans this relationship is a responsibility to preserve and protect what Pope Francis termed **Our Common Home**, an idea he adopted from St. Francis of Assisi. This statement of the diocese has become even more relevant as we have just celebrated the Feast of St. Francis, the Patron of Ecology, on October 4, 2022 and even so as we are implementing the Action Plan of *Laudato Si*.

- **The Cry of the Earth /The Cry of the Poor**

In Ghana today we hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor even louder because of the destruction and injustice perpetrated by mining, legal or illegal, large-scale or small-scale. There are signs, as mentioned earlier, that this destruction and injustice against 'Our Common Home' and the poor are at the doorstep of our clean and beautiful Oti Region and her elder sister, the Volta Region. Attempts have already been made to convince our traditional leaders to allow this destruction in certain communities as if it is going to make the Regions rich and create employment for the youth. It appears, particularly on the part of us Catholics, that we are deliberately ignoring the principles of *Laudato Si* and the recent seeming efforts of the Government of Ghana to stop this destruction. Our traditional leaders are presumably aware of the happenings and their consequences in some regions of the country: the unrest, poverty, floods, upsurge of skin diseases, variety of cancers, HIV/AIDS, birth of deformed babies, premature or early deaths among the youth etc. We assume that they (Traditional Leaders) are committed to stopping these dangers to life and livelihood from entering our communities.

With regards to floods, the recent occurrence in the Eastern Region when Rivers Birim, Densu and Ayensu overflowed their banks and entered homes and even claimed lives should give as the signal of the cry of the earth due to the destruction caused by mining.

- **Factors Underlying the Destruction of Our Environment**

Fundamentally the inordinate quest for wealth in Ghana, regardless of the methods and the consequences for its acquisition, has led to this unrestrained exploitation and destruction of our environment. It is because of this evil attitude that chemicals and methods that are hazardous to health and the protection of our environment are recklessly used. Apart from the heavy ground-moving equipment that is being used - something that is a far cry from what our ancestors used in mining gold and other minerals without disturbing the environment, such dangerous chemicals as Lead, Cadmium, Zinc, Mercury, Arsenic, Chromium, Cyanide and Copper which have been introduced into mining activities with careless abandon, do nothing but cause harm to the growth, development, reproduction, and behaviour of living things.

- **Pollution of Water Bodies**

In the mining areas in the country, increased mining activities have resulted in widespread contamination of major water bodies leading to loss of aquatic creatures such as fish,

destruction of biodiversity, removal of vegetation, depletion of soil resources, and loss of farmlands. Also, these activities have led to the slow development of animals, reproduction of deformed offspring of both animals and human, and extinction of species. The biodiversity is reduced and the ecosystem has been seriously damaged, and the farmland polluted by mine acid. No doubt, foreign markets have started rejecting agricultural produce from Ghana.

Apart from the destruction of the biodiversity, rivers in mining areas are polluted beyond imagination and can no more serve as sources of drinking water for local people. An important example is the current state, and its implications, of Rivers Pra, which takes its source from the Eastern Region and flows through the Central and ends in the Western Region and the Ankobra in the Western-North and the Western Regions of Ghana. Also, BBC news in 2021 estimated that 60% of Ghana's water bodies were already polluted, largely due to illegal mining activities. Worse than the implications of the pollution of the Pra and Ankobra Rivers, mining in the Volta and Oti Regions would mean that major river bodies such as Dayi, Konsu, Menu, Asukawkaw, Wawa, Sarbon, Chai, Kpassa and Oti, which all feed the Volta Lake, will be polluted with greater repercussion for the whole country.

- **Impacts of Mining on Livelihood of Local People**

Mining may generally create employment opportunities to local people. However, the obvious reality we know is that the quality of life of the people has been reduced due to denial of access to farm lands, leading to hunger and its related challenges. With the destruction of sources of domestic water, stress has been put on women and children who now walk very long distances in search of clean water, taking us back to the practices of very olden days. All these have negative correlation on the health of the people and the quality of education of children. Additionally, large plantations such as cocoa and oil palm have been destroyed by mining activities and this affects the livelihood of the local People who can no longer engage in any meaningful subsistence farming, because of unavailability of productive land, to supplement their food needs. Thus, local people in mining communities in Ghana are left poorer than a few decades ago.

- **Erosion and Other Dangers**

Because of mining activities vast sections of lands in mining areas have been rendered bare and infertile. The repercussion has been excessive erosion which creates massive gullies,

excessive run-off, reduced soil infiltration, reduction in groundwater recharge, and the ultimate consequent loss of land productivity

In other cases, careless mining activities result in the loss of lives such as the cases of the over 100 people who were buried alive in a pit near River Ofin in 2010 and the 16 who died in a mine-field at Kyekyewere, near Dunkwa in 2013.

- **Possible Consequences of Mining on Mountainous Areas**

Mining in and around mountainous areas could be a potential cause of disasters. For instance, if mining would be done on the Akpafu Todzi, Teteman, and other nearby mountainous areas, the constant disturbance of the mountains and vibrations caused by heavy equipment could lead to landslides. The result will be that a whole village such as Teteman or Akpafu Todzi, could slide off causing death, harm to lives and properties. Communities living in the nearby valleys could also be buried by the same landslides. In the case of Bowiri communities, their ancestral home will be destroyed.

There is no guarantee that mining in the Oti Region will contribute to the economy of the local people. The aforementioned repercussions, the destruction of the environment, the health implications and the worsening indigenous economy far outweigh the benefits that could be derived from mining the mineral resources.

- **Our Stance**

In considering all that has been said, we call upon the traditional leaders, both in the Oti and Volta Regions to take a determined and uncompromising stance against the mining of the mineral resources which have now been discovered and those yet to be discovered. We would like to remind them that their greatest responsibility from God and our ancestors is to protect the lives God has entrusted to them to lead.

We call upon all government officials within these two regions to re-examine, whatever agreement they must have reached with companies which have been invited or contracted to mine these resources namely: the iron ore, the gold and the lithium. In connection with the forgoing, a few pertinent questions arise. First, are the repercussions of mining these mineral resources mentioned above favourable or not to our people? Second, will the mining of these mineral resources address the present and future needs of the people? We would like to remind the people of these two regions that they have inalienable right to life and for that reason any

reality which has the potential to threaten this life must be resisted. In this regard we urge them to deny any necessary support for the mining of these mineral resources in our two regions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. A. Mante', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Most Rev. Gabriel A. A. Mante
CATHOLIC BISHOP OF JASIKAN