

KEY NOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS OF THE GHANA CHAMBER OF MINES, MR. AHMED NANTOGMAH, AT THE LAUNCH AND CELEBRATION OF THE 2017 INTERNATIONAL NURSES DAY BY THE GHANA NURSES AND MIDWIVES ASSOCIATION ON 12TH MAY, 2017

Venerable Chairperson

H.E. President of the Republic of Ghana

Hon. Minister of Health

Chief Director of the Ministry of Health

President and Executives of the Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association

Distinguished Traditional Leaders

Esteemed Medical Practitioners

Ladies and Gentlemen

I deem it a great honour to join this distinguished Association to commemorate the 17th International Nurses Day Celebration. Our Chamber, which is an Association of responsible companies with interests in the mining sector, has symbiotic relationship with the health sector at both the local and national level. Indeed, our member companies invest significantly in the provision of health infrastructure in their operational areas. As an industry, the health and safety of our workers and the communities within which we operate is second to none. As the Roman philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero, diligently stated: “The safety of the people shall be the highest law.” I would go further to add that the health and safety of every person should be the highest law. Much as our core business is mining and profitability, the centre piece of this core business is our workforce.

Against this backdrop, it is very apt for the Association to liaise with the Chamber on the occasion of this event, which is under the theme **“Health implications of “Galamsey” and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals; Nurses and Midwives, acting in one voice with stakeholders”**

Madam Chairperson, before I delve into the urgent matter of today's gathering, permit me to showcase how the mining industry demonstrates its commitment to the wellbeing of the people. Through various Corporate Social Investment initiatives and projects of our member companies, we have established and managed various healthcare institutions and services as a means of improving the livelihoods of our people. These projects include nursing training facilities, hospitals, water and sanitation projects, as well as preventive healthcare projects. In 2016, our member companies spent USD\$ 2.2 million on some of these projects. In 2015, the Chamber supported the Ministry of Health with medical consumables worth GH¢ 100,000 to shore up the country's response plan for the potential outbreak of the dreaded Ebola. Additionally, many of the health facilities funded by the Chamber have provided job opportunities for nurses and midwives as well as other healthcare professionals aside playing a significant role as major care providers within these host communities and beyond.

Ladies and gentlemen, the narrative on economic development of most nations and improvements in the well-being of their population cannot be recounted without reference to the central role of mining. Most minerals endowed countries have leveraged these natural resources to transform their economies in a sustainable manner and reduce the incidence of poverty among their people. At the same time, the presence of economic minerals in some countries has also culminated in events that have made their people worse-off. The contrast in economic development outcomes of the presence and exploitation of resource endowments reflect the conditions that are deliberately created to support the activity of mining. As pointed out by the International Council of Metals and Mining (ICMM) "Mining can provide an important, and sometimes critical, contribution to economic development and poverty reduction - provided the underlying conditions are right."

Ghana has a long history of mining, which predates the arrival of the first European vessel in 1471. In the period spanning the arrival of the Portuguese in Ghana and post self-rule, mining has evolved from a livelihood activity to a large scale business. In the process, it has also become pivotal to the development of the country. In 2016, for instance, data from the Bank of Ghana shows that revenue from the exports of minerals amounted to 46% of the total value of goods

exported. In nominal terms, this translates into USD 5.05 billion and it is a little more than twice and thrice the receipts from the export of cocoa and crude oil respectively.

Madam Chairperson, some commentators have a penchant for discounting the very important role of mining as a source of forex by arguing that all the proceeds of mineral exports are retained in off-shore accounts. If this were the case, how would mining companies honour their numerous liabilities to suppliers, State, employees and communities? Since 2009, producing member companies of the Chamber of Mines have returned an average of 73% of their realized mineral revenue into the country, both through the commercial banks and Central Bank.

Furthermore, the mining industry has been the leading source of direct domestic revenue mobilized by the Ghana Revenue Authority. On the average, the sector accounts for about one-fifth of direct domestic revenue in the last six years. In 2016, the GRA adjudged Gold Fields and Newmont as the first and second largest tax payers in Ghana respectively. Similarly, a study by ACET and Steward Redqueen show that for each employment created on the mine, fifteen additional jobs are induced across the value chain of the industry. As at the end of 2016, the workforce of the producing member companies stood at nearly 12,000. The figures I have shared with you are indicators that relate only to large scale mining sector and they are a veritable proof of the potential of mining, if properly regulated, to bolster our shared aspiration of ending poverty as reflected in the first Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, weak regulatory oversight and parochial political considerations have resulted in the proliferation of sophisticated illegal mining activities virtually replacing the once artisanal small scale mining, which relied on traditional tools for mining mine with a relatively diminished impact on the environment. These illegal miners use heavy earth moving equipment and banned chemicals with heightened existential threats to current and future generations.

Madam Chairperson, the practice of illegal mining, which is markedly different from small-scale mining, basically involves the extraction of mineral without the requisite license from the Minerals Commission or in an area not specified within the mining lease. Persons who participate in this illicit activity open up the earth to remove precious minerals without recourse

to due process and in so doing, endanger the lives of many Ghanaians. For instance, mining in water bodies, which is completely outlawed, poses colossal health risks to the population and has adverse implications on the country's capacity to achieve SDGs 6 and 14; namely:

1. "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all"
2. "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development"

The Ghana Water Company Limited estimates that its main water sources in all regions of the country have been polluted by illegal mining activities save for Northern, Greater Accra and Volta Regions. The ominous health risk is even compounded by the use of mercury in processing mineral ore and its disposal in water bodies. As you well know, the ingestion of mercury into our bodies; through inhalation, consumption of contaminated fishes or drinking of untreated or poorly treated water, is known to lead to kidney and lung defects, skin diseases, poor mental function and neuromuscular changes.

This perilous threat confronts over 80% of the country's population who source their drinking water from pipes, boreholes or surface water bodies. The situation is particularly grave on account of the fact that the incidence of illegal mining is high in areas without access to piped water. In essence, the majority of persons in areas where illegal mining occurs depend on water from boreholes or surface water, which is easily susceptible to pollutants. Even in areas where piped water is available, the cost of treating raw water for distribution has increased as a result of the pollution by illegal miners. In some cases, it has even led to the premature closure of water treatment plants that were financed with the tax payer's hard earned income. Classic examples are found in the closure of Abessim and Kyebi water treatment plants in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

Another remarkable feature of illegal mining in Ghana is that it occurs in the bread basket areas of our country. No doubt that this has implications for continuous food production and ultimately, food security, which is also the thrust of SDG 2: "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture".

Even though statistics are limited, they suggest that some farmers trade their arable lands, sometimes involuntarily, to illegal miners. This is particularly common among cocoa farmers, which is the country's leading cash crop. As a result, illegal mining has been cited as one of the major causes for the decline in cocoa production.

More so, access to competitively priced food correlates directly with the nutritional well-being of our people. Nutrition is not only a core determinant of health but also economic growth. A study by Wang and Taniguchi (2002) suggests that the long run GDP per capita growth rate can be increased by 0.5 percentage points if Dietary Energy Supply is increased by 500 kcal/day. It is therefore absolutely imperative to safeguard the sources of food for our country.

Madam Chairperson, the problem of illegal mining and its harmful impacts on our societies must galvanize every Ghanaian to demand an end to this canker as well as be involved in finding a solution to it. On the part of the Chamber of Mines, we reiterate our commitment to support the government and the Minerals Commission to permanently remediate and eliminate illegal mining. Already, the Chamber spearheaded the amendment of the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) to provide for the confiscation of the inputs and output of illegal mining as well as the criminalization of the illicit activity. Further, the Chamber worked closely with the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT) to develop a technology called "Sika Bukyia" to substitute the use of mercury in processing of minerals. In addition, our member companies have been providing viable alternative livelihood programmes for residents of host mining communities impacted by mining. These successful models can be replicated across the country to "resettle" persons who have been weaned of illegal mining.

There have been several reports of deaths in illegal mining pits across the country. Our young people are losing their lives in search of precious minerals. We cannot continue to look on when the country is losing the productive segment of its population to such illegal activities that bears no fruit to the state. There is a need to provide viable alternative job opportunities for these young people that will draw them away from such destructive vocations. In this regard, the Chamber has been engaging the government and other industry associations to build the

necessary linkages that generate jobs in different sectors to absorb a chunk of the unemployed youth.

Ultimately, the country must explore ways of transforming small-scale mining into properly regulated and viable businesses that can contribute meaningfully to our developmental efforts. For instance, the Minerals Commission can support the small-scale mining sub-sector by undertaking geological investigations before parceling out the concessions to the miners. The geological data could be used to collateralize loans from financial institutions or raise funds from the Stock Exchange to finance the construction of a mine that has the capacity to provide decent employment for many persons as envisaged under SDG 8. This structure will preempt the wanton degradation of our natural environment and minimize the health impacts associated with mining.

Madam Chairperson, even as I bring my address to a conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the fight against illegal mining is the struggle for our nation's soul. I urge us all to support the government's approach to addressing the illegal mining menace and to support them with the necessary ideas to end the vicious dissipation of natural resources and environment. Our forebears bequeathed an independent country and pristine environment to us and it is our turn to pass on a prosperous and healthy environment to posterity. As nurses and midwives, we also have a responsibility to educate the public on the potentially fatal effects of illegal mining. We must not be cowed into mortgaging the well-being of a few Ghanaians for the collateral damage of the many Ghanaians who do not participate or benefit from the illegality. This is the time for health workers who are at the fore front of witnessing the negative health implications of illegal mining to step up and be heard. On this note, I call on all nurses and midwives to act in one voice with stakeholders to stop illegal mining in our dear nation.

I wish you well in the rest of your activities to mark this momentous occasion.

Thank you for your kind attention.