



Press Statement

ITUC-Africa Stands in Solidarity with Ghana's Organized Labour's Nationwide Strike Against Galamsey and calls on other African governments to halt illegal mining activities

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation Africa (ITUC-Africa www.ituc-africa.org) expresses its unwavering support for the nationwide strike declared by organised labour in Ghana, effective 10 October 2024. The decision to embark on this action is a direct response to the government's failure to address the pervasive and destructive issue of illegal mining (Galamsey), which continues to wreak havoc on the environment, public health, and the livelihoods of workers across the country.

The Ghanaian workforce, both in the formal and informal sectors, has suffered the brunt of Galamsey's far-reaching consequences. ITUC-Africa joins organised labour in calling on all workers to stay at home until the government demonstrates concrete action to end the devastating practices of illegal mining, which pose an existential threat to the country's immediate future.

Impact on Workers and Their Livelihoods

Workers in various sectors—farmers, fisherfolk, healthcare providers, and artisans—are directly and negatively impacted by the environmental degradation caused by illegal mining. We are witnessing the destruction of farmlands, making it impossible for rural workers to grow food and sustain their families. Rivers and water bodies, once sources of livelihood for fisherfolk and sources of potable water, have been contaminated with mercury and other harmful chemicals, rendering them unusable.

In urban areas, the health implications of toxic waste and contaminated water systems have escalated public health concerns. The Ghana Medical Association (GMA) and several health unions, including the Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association (GRNMA) and the Health Services Workers Union of Ghana, have raised alarm over the serious public health and sanitation risks associated with Galamsey. The exposure to hazardous substances not only jeopardises the health of those directly involved in mining but also places a heavy burden on the nation's healthcare systems, threatening the well-being of all Ghanaians.

Environmental and Economic Impact

The environmental damage from illegal mining is staggering. Deforestation, land degradation, and water contamination have destroyed ecosystems and livelihoods central to the Ghanaian economy. The loss of arable land has robbed farmers of their means to produce food, contributing to rising levels of poverty and food insecurity. Moreover, the government loses significant tax revenue due to the illicit nature of Galamsey operations, further exacerbating the economic hardships faced by the country.

The cost of environmental restoration is enormous, with the government and communities bearing the financial and social consequences. The longer this issue persists, the greater the economic burden it places on all workers and citizens, further entrenching and deepening poverty and inequality between and among generations, genders and communities.

ITUC-Africa's Call for Immediate Action

ITUC-Africa demands immediate and decisive action from the Ghanaian government. We join organised labour and allied unions in urging the government to:

1. **Implement a Complete Ban on All Galamsey Operations:** The government must enforce a total ban on all illegal mining activities and hold those involved accountable. A strict and transparent regulatory framework for small-scale mining is necessary to safeguard the environment and protect communities.
2. **Strengthen the Enforcement of Mining Laws:** The government must strengthen the capacity of regulatory bodies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Minerals Commission to monitor and clamp down on illegal mining activities effectively. The government must empower law enforcement agencies to take swift action and be free from corruption and political interference.
3. **Introduce Sustainable Livelihood Programs:** To alleviate the economic challenges faced by those involved in illegal mining, the government should invest in sustainable livelihood alternatives. These alternatives should include agricultural and vocational training programs that offer meaningful and long-term employment opportunities, particularly for those in rural areas affected by Galamsey.
4. **Rehabilitate Degraded Lands and Water Bodies:** Restoring damaged ecosystems must be a top priority. With support from international partners, the government should invest in reforestation, soil rehabilitation, and the cleaning of contaminated water bodies to restore Ghana's natural environment and secure the livelihoods of its citizens.
5. **Raise Public Awareness and Promote Education on Environmental Conservation:** The government, civil society organisations, and unions must lead a national campaign to educate the public about the dangers of illegal mining and promote sustainable practices. Community leaders should be involved in efforts to protect local resources and hold illegal miners accountable.
6. **Ensure Regional and International Cooperation:** Galamsey often involves cross-border actors and networks. The government should strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries and international organisations to combat the illicit trade of minerals and prevent illegal mining operations.
7. **The call applies to other African governments – our critical minerals must sustainably benefit us.** Whilst the Ghanaian illegal mining case generates public hostility and calls for a halt, we note that similar experiences are replete in other African economies. Our governments must take measured steps to pursue a collaborative and inclusive approach to implementing the African Mining Vision (AMV). Critical minerals would significantly influence our aspirations for economic manufacturing/industrialisation. Therefore, we must work to achieve beneficiation of our mineral wealth in a safe, healthy, transparent and sustainable manner.

In conclusion, ITUC-Africa stands in solidarity with the Ghanaian workforce in this critical moment. We urge all workers, from both the formal and informal sectors, to participate in this peaceful and necessary action by staying home until the government meets our collective demands. We call on the government to prioritise its people's health, well-being, and livelihoods over short-term economic gains from illegal mining.

We also call on ALL our affiliates to express public solidarity with the workers and people of Ghana in this effort to preserve public health and safety, commonwealth, and national existence. It is in our collective interest to halt this dangerous and growing economic trend in the African extractive sectors to secure our environment, economies, communities, and people's well-being.

Issued on behalf of African workers by:

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ITUC-Africa General Secretary

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