This is a map created from satellite data of the region around Obuasi, in southern Ghana. The

This is a map created from satellite data of the region around Obuasi, in southern Ghana. The dark green shapes show forest reserves; the yellow shows small-scale and artisanal gold mining is known locally as "galamsey." Ghana's religious leaders are calling for prayer and fasting to end the illegal mining. (CNS photo/courtesy NASA)



Damian Avevor

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Accra, Ghana — October 20, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Religious leaders called for a week of fasting and prayer for the environment because of the devastation that illegal mining, or "galamsey," is causing, including adversely affecting people's health and the economy.

"We are calling for a week of fasting and prayers to pray for change of hearts and for God's mercy upon our nation for the destruction we have caused the environment," Archbishop Philip Naameh, president of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, said Oct. 17. He spoke on behalf of the Christian ecumenical bodies, which include Christian and Muslim leaders, among others.

"With immediate effect, we call on religious leaders to wear red armbands to show our deep concern for the destruction of our environment through galamsey," he said. "For many years now, our sovereign country Ghana has been witnessing, under our very naked eyes, the saddest environmental coup d'état ever unleashed upon our nation, heralding a programmed and complete ecological disaster or destruction."

Naameh said that in pastoral and social visits around the country, "we see, denounce and cry over the wicked and greedy destruction of our forest resources."

He decried the cutting down of cash crops on a massive scale, degrading of the land and polluting the rivers with mining chemicals like mercury, chlorine and cyanide, which kill aquatic life.

"Our ecosystems are being destroyed irreversibly; our soils are contaminated with poisonous chemicals, which are very difficult if not impossible to clean them up," he said, adding, "Our people are drinking dangerously polluted water; some of our mission hospitals are recording increased strange diseases."

He said an increasing number of women were being treated for cervical and uterine cancer, and other people — including children — were being diagnosed with kidney disease. He said the number of stillbirths was increasing.

The effects on crops were "so bad that some countries, like Japan, require extra testing of our cocoa products before they can be accepted on their markets," he said.

"Marine life, our livestock, birds, insects and game reserves all depend on, drink and use these highly polluted waters also. Their meat and edible vegetation all end upon our dining tables."

"We have become 'living-dead-polluted-walking Ghanaians.' We need to rise up and confront the situation to save our nation," he said.

The U.S. Commerce Department's International Trade Administration says gold accounts for about accounting for about 95% of Ghana's mineral revenue.

About 35% of the gold in Ghana is extracted through illegal small-scale and artisanal gold mining, or galamsey. Environmentalists say their effects outweigh those of the larger mines. For instance, the mercury and heavy metals can contaminate drinking water and lead to kidney and neurological problems.

On Oct. 14, the religious leaders toured some galamsey sites in Ghana's Eastern Region. Fr. Dieu-Donne Davor, communications director of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, who was part of the team, told Catholic News Service: "The devastation is terrible. Forests and water bodies have been destroyed. It is very disheartening."

The leadership of the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious is calling on priests to educate people on the situation.

In addition, the conference plans "to train some youth in the affected areas in the country to acquire various skills and give them start-up kits for sustainable employment," said Sr. Theodora Adzayawo, a member of the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church and executive secretary of the conference.

Advertisement