May 17, 2022

**PRESS RELEASE**

**GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO PROTECTING ACHIMOTA FOREST**

Following the publication of the Forests (Cessation of Forest Reserve) Instrument, 2022 (E.I 144), there have been reports circulating in some sessions of the media that the Achimota Forest Reserve has been sold. The general public is entreated to disregard these reports as they are false, baseless and non-factual. Indeed, what the propagators of these messages have refused to add is that, E.I. 144 was published together with the Forests (Achimota Firewood Plantation Forest Reserve) (Amendment) Instrument, 2022 (E.I. 154).

What EI 144 does is to make the peripheral portions of the Forest Reserve, which had already been granted to the Owoo Family in September, 2013, portions of which have already been developed, cease to be a Forest Reserve, to ensure a development that is consistent with the area of the Forest Reserve.

Further, E.I. 154, on the other hand, states emphatically, the area of the forest shall remain a Forest Reserve. Both instruments contain adequate provisions that seek to protect the ecological integrity of the Forest Reserve.

The facts leading to the publication of these two instruments are as follows:

* In 1921, the Government of the then Gold Coast, by a Certificate of Title dated 16th December 1921, made under the Public Lands Ordinance, 1876, acquired from the Owoo Family the parcel of land on which the Achimota School is situated.
* Subsequently, by another Certificate of Title dated 17th May, 1927, the Government acquired from the same Family another tract of land measuring approximately four hundred and seventy-nine (479) hectares as an extension to the Achimota School. Although there are receipts indicating payment of compensation for the 1921 acquisition, there are no records of payment of compensation for the 1927 acquisition.
* By an Order 31 of 1930, dated July 17, 1930, the Government, pursuant to its power under the Forests Act, 1927, (Cap 157), constituted the land acquired in 1927, as a Forest Reserve for the purposes of Fuel Wood Plantation for Achimota School.
* Following several encroachments on the Forest Reserve, the pre-acquisition owners, the Owoo Family, in 2007, submitted a petition to the then President, H.E. John Agyekum Kufuor, for the release of the portion of the Forest Reserve adjoining the Tema motorway. After consultations between the Office of President and the relevant bodies, it was recommended that that portion of the Forest Reserve be released to the Owoo Family. This culminated in an Agreement dated 24th November, 2008 between the Government, acting by the then Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines, and the Owoo Family for the grant of a lease over ninety (90) acres of the land to the Owoo Family for a term of ninety-nine (99) years. The Lease agreement was however not executed as agreed.
* In 2011, the Owoo Family, submitted another petition to the then Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, Hon. Mike Hammah, for the grant of portions of the Forest Reserve. The Minister constituted a committee, chaired by the then Chairman of the then Chief Executive Officer of the Forestry Commission, Mr. Samuel Afari Dartey, to inquire into the legitimacy of the request and its impact on the Forest Reserve.
* The Committee after its investigations concluded that the request of the Owoo Family was legitimate.
* The Minister then, sought executive approval to implement the recommendations of the Committee.
* On 5th September, 2013, the then President of the Republic, H.E. John Dramani Mahama, gave Executive Approval for the conversion of the Forest Reserve into an Ecotourism Park, and to release the peripheral portions of the Forest Reserve to the Owoo Family, in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee.
* Pursuant to the said Executive Approval, the Forestry Commission, acting on behalf of the then President, H.E. John Dramani Mahama, three (3) leases executed in September 2013, granted these portions of the Forest Reserve to the Owoo Family for a term of ninety-nine (99) years. The Family then registered the land in its name and granted sub-leases to other private developers with the consent of the Forestry Commission. However, because the land remained a Forest Reserve, by virtue of Order 31 of 1930, the lessees and sub-lessees could not develop the land, although they had obtained all the necessary permits.
* Pursuant to the same Executive Approval, the Forestry Commission, acting on behalf of the then President of the Republic, H.E. John Dramani Mahama, entered into an agreement with Aikan Capital, a limited liability company for the development of core area of the Forest into an Ecotourism Park. The Commission also executed a lease agreement with the company in February 2016, by which 227.84 hectares of the Forest Reserve was leased to the company to undertake the planned development.
* The Owoo Family and their grantees, in a bid to develop the peripheral portions of the land which had already been granted to them, continued to petition Government to release of the peripheral portions as a Forest Reserve. Government, after assessing the entire situation, and based on the advice of the Forestry Commission, that the ecological integrity of the Forest Reserve will not be compromised by the Release, decided to release the peripheral portions of the land from the Forest Reserve.
* This led to the publication of the two instruments, the Forests (Cessation of Forest Reserve) Instrument, 2022 (E.I 144), and the Forests (Achimota Firewood Plantation Forest Reserve) (Amendment) Instrument, 2022 (E.I. 154). The first makes the peripheral portions of the Forest Reserve, which had already been granted to the Owoo Family in 2013, with portions developed, cease to be a Forest Reserve. The second, amends the area of the land that should continue as Forest Reserve.
* However, as part of measures to ensure that the area of the Forest is not compromised, both Instruments contain provisions that restrict the nature of the development that can take place on the land. Under E.I. 144 for example, before any development can take place on the peripheral portions of the Forest that has ceased to be a Forest Reserve,
* Land Use and Spatial Authority shall prepare a Master Plan for the development of the area, taking into consideration the ecological integrity of the remaining portions of the Forest Reserve.
* The Master Plan must be approved by the Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, acting on the advice of the Forestry Commission;
* No development can take place without the express approval of the Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, taking into consideration the ecological integrity of the Forest.

The Achimota Forest remains an integral part of Government’s plan for the protection of our forest cover, and our agenda for aggressive afforestation and reforestation. Government, through the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, will continue to protect the Achimota Forest and prevent it from being further encroached. Government is also committed to ensuring that whatever that happens on the peripheral portions of the land, does not affect the ecological integrity of the Forest.

**END**

**SIGNED**

**HON. SAMUEL A. JINAPOR, MP**

**MINISTER**