STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON BEST WAYS OF ADDRESSING THE ILLEGAL MINING (GALAMSEY) MENACE BY HONOURABLE GEORGE MIREKU DUKER MP FOR TARKWA-NSUAEM - 3 MARCH, 2017

Mr Speaker, I am very grateful and privileged for the opportunity to make a Statement on the high incidence of illegal mining “Galamsey”, which seem to be on the ascendancy, despite all the numerous efforts and attempts at curbing or reducing its high incidence. Mr Speaker, the current disorderly and unregulated manner in which mining operations and activities are carried out leaves much to be desired and constitutes a huge drawback on the progress and economic wellbeing of the country.

It is an incontrovertible fact that Ghana abounds in natural resources with gold leading the mineral resources pack. There is however an urgent need to exploit these resources in a systematic and sustained manner, so that, the nation can derive the expected income and benefits while avoiding all negative approaches that would be detrimental to the nation’s citizens, water bodies, as well as the environment.

Mr Speaker, the “Galamsey” activity has become a serious canker which needs to be eradicated in order to bring sanity to the mining sector and its related activities. Mr Speaker, illegal mining creates a lot of threats to the society where it occurs. In most cases, the most vulnerable groups are women and children who work as porters for the illegal miners. Apart from the instances of health risk, “Galamsey” also causes serious degradation and pollution of the environment.

Also, many of those who work around the vicinity where “Galamsey” operations occur operate with an unsafe quantity or levels of mercury which is very dangerous to their health.

Mr Speaker, many lives have been lost due to the activities of these illegal miners. A number of unfortunate incidents have been reported in the Media in recent times. I can recall a most recent one where over 100 persons lost their lives in Dunkwa-on-Offin in the Central Region when a pit collapsed near the Offin River. In a similar tragedy in Dompoase in the Wassa Amenfi East District of the Western Region, about 18 persons died when they got trapped under another collapsed pit. Out of the 18 bodies that were retrieved, 14 were women, which buttresses the point that, women are the most vulnerable.

The Ashanti and Eastern Regions have also had their fair share of these negative nation wrecking activity, and some of the places that have suffered most are the Amansie District in Ashanti, Abirem and Kyebi in the Eastern Region. In fact, the activities of illegal miners is widespread and stretches as far as the northern parts of the country where the activity has become very rampant in recent times.

Mr Speaker, another worrisome aspect of this menace is the collaboration between Ghanaians and foreigners to selfishly and illegally exploit our natural mineral resources with sophisticated equipment and dangerous chemicals. There are even instances where these foreigners, who are armed with sophisticated weapons, engage in shooting battles with task forces that are assigned
to check the illegal activities of the miners. Mr Speaker, in view of the serious nature of the problem, I would like to make a number of suggestions that will help reduce, if not eradicate, the illegal mining menace.

First of all, there should be a well-organized and effective means to register, license and properly regulate all mining groups. In this regard, all the groups, particularly youth groups, should be trained and lawfully licensed before being allowed to operate as miners. This, if properly regulated, could enhance the revenue generation in the respective assemblies.

Mr Speaker, additionally, there should be assigned lands, set aside purposely for small-scale mining, whereby field inspectors or regulators are attached to the licensed workers to ensure the application of best practices as far as compliance with mining regulations are concerned, instead of the current indiscriminate manner which most times, results in loss of innocent lives and degradation of the environment.

Mr Speaker, reclamation of degraded lands must be part of the requirement in assigning small scale concessions. Training of youth groups and supporting them with the required equipment could also help resolve the high unemployment rate and curb the “Galamsey” menace instead of the regular “Shoot and Kill” method currently employed in fighting the menace.

Moreover, regulators in the industry should be tasked to ensure that materials and chemicals used are safe and environmentally friendly. This will inadvertently help eradicate some of the diseases caused by exposure to harmful chemicals. Mr Speaker, there should be concerted effort and close collaboration among all relevant stakeholders, including Environmental Protection Agency, Ministry of Mines and Natural Resources, chiefs and well-meaning citizens, to work together to curb the menace.

Mr Speaker, most important is the introduction of stringent legislation that could deter people from engaging in illegal mining, but which has certain incentives to encourage people to give up their illegal mining activities. Mr Speaker, the suggestion for the introduction of effective legislation, ties in with your call on Members of this House to come up with Private Members Bill, that would help change certain wrongs in the society but which will not have financial implications to the State. Based on this, I wish to take this opportunity to call on my Hon Colleagues whose Constituencies are directly affected by the “Galamsey” menace to come together to introduce a very effective legislation in the form of Private Members Bill to tackle this devastating menace.

Mr Speaker, on this note, I say a big thank you for this opportunity.