



HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC
THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SCHOOL of LAW

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THE COST OF GOLD: MINING THREATENS LIVES AND RUINS LIVELIHOODS IN GHANA

Ghanaians evicted from their land, accosted by the military, their water poisoned

Abena Koale, a 40-year-old Ghanaian farmer, had lived on her land almost her entire life. In 2000, she answered her door and was moved from her farm that very day by a representative of Goldfields Ghana Limited. Ms. Koale is just one of thousands of Ghanaian farmers whose land has been taken from them without adequate compensation. They have been forced to abandon their homes and find a new life.

The Human Rights Clinic at The University of Texas School of Law has uncovered and documented the circumstances Ghanaians living in the Tarkwa area in the Western Region Ghana must face on a daily basis. The Clinic collaborated with the Center for Public Interest Law and the Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM) in its mission. The Clinic went to Ghana in October of 2009, surveyed the Tarkwa area, and conducted interviews to produce a report, entitled *The Cost of Gold: Communities Affected by Mining in the Tarkwa Region of Ghana*, which was released today and available at <http://www.utexas.edu/law/clinics/humanrights/>.

The Ghanaian government allows mining companies to enter a given community with little input and no consent from the affected community. Any consultation and cooperation means very little to the local communities who are disadvantaged in negotiations and cannot adequately participate in the decision-making process. Most importantly, Ghanaians are left without recourse when they are ignored. Many community members who have lost their property have been inadequately compensated, if at all. However, illegal eviction without adequate compensation is just a small component of the abuses in Ghana, the Clinic's report finds.

Mining companies frequently spill toxic waste and cyanide into rivers in Tarkwa. "Some people who mistakenly went swimming in the river had their skin peeled off," explained Daniel Owusu-Koranteng, director of WACAM, in the report, "Those who drank the polluted water and ate some of the fish are having serious stomach problems."

Joyce Oboako, at just eight months old, was a victim of the gold mining activities in the Prestea community. She fell off her bed as a result of a blasting technique used in mining. Her resulting head trauma left her with developmental problems. These blasts also produce cracks in homes and dust that lead to respiratory problems, skin rashes, and damaged crops. This is just part of the heavy cost of gold paid by Ghanaians.

The report concludes that mining companies are able to exploit Ghanaian communities due to their financial strength and ability to lobby chiefs, public servants, and government officials with no accountability. Therefore, those responsible for protecting Ghanaians' rights are left without any incentive to do so.

Local communities affected by mining suspect that chiefs and government officials receive illegal benefits from the mining companies. These benefits are not passed on to community members. In the report, Matthias, a local farmer, blames his chief for the loss of his land. However, outspoken community members are liable to be kicked out of their communities by their chiefs, so they often remain silent.

Tensions between exploited Ghanaians and mining companies are on the rise. Peaceful protests have led to violent encounters between locals and the military sent to keep the peace at mining sites. Tear gas, beatings, and bullets have been unleashed on crowds of demonstrators.

In 2006, Anthony Baidoo, a victim of one of these clashes, was shot while fleeing open fire from the military which was acting on behalf of AngloGold Ashanti Limited. He is now partially-paralyzed. He explains, "I just don't have the strength and that means I don't have any money to buy food and look after my children." With no one on their side, defending their human rights, Ghanaians will continue to shoulder the oppressive cost of gold.

The Human Rights Clinic calls on the Ghanaian government to enforce existing laws that protect Ghanaians and change laws that allow mining companies to exploit them. As the mining continues in the Tarkwa area in the Western Region of Ghana, the quality of life for the Ghanaians in the local communities continues to worsen. With the government taking little or no action against the mining companies, the Ghanaians in the Tarkwa area are left to fend for themselves. Considering the mining companies' financial strength and the government's complicity, this is an uphill battle.

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The Human Rights Clinic is part of the University of Texas School of Law. In the Clinic, an interdisciplinary group of law students and graduate students work under the supervision of Clinic Director Ariel Dulitzky, on human rights projects through fact finding, reporting and other public advocacy. The Clinic is involved in a multitude of activities including supporting advocacy in domestic and international fora; investigating and documenting human rights violations; and engaging with global and local human rights campaigns.

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