

CALL FOR URGENT ACTION TO END SAIKO TO SAVE THE LIVELIHOODS OF OVER 2.7 MILLION GHANAIS

Dear Mr. President,

We respectfully call upon you to issue an urgent directive to end “saiko” fishing, an illegality that is undermining your commendable efforts to protect the fishing industry that provides food security and livelihoods for over 2.7 million Ghanaians.

Saiko is a severely destructive form of illegal fishing, where industrial trawlers target the staple catch of artisanal fishers and sell this fish back to local coastal communities at a profit. It threatens jobs and food security and endangers Ghana’s economy. It is also referred to as “Galamsey on the sea”.

Industrial trawlers, licensed to harvest demersal (bottom-dwelling) species such as octopus, are now deliberately targeting the same species as the artisanal fishing community. This phenomenon has contributed to the decline and near collapse of the small pelagic stocks such as sardinella (Eban in fante), chub mackerel (Saman in Ga) and anchovies (Abobi in Ewe). The specially adapted saiko canoes are designed for transporting frozen fish and not for fishing. They land these catches at the ports of Elmina, Apam and Axim for onward sale to local markets.

The scientific community has predicted that the small pelagic fishery – known as the “people’s fish” – may collapse by end of this year if key measures, such as addressing Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, are not immediately implemented. Engagement with over 2,000 fishers across the four coastal regions has confirmed this prediction: fishers reveal that the marine fisheries are in a deplorable state, with an increasing number of fishing trips recording “zero catch”.

Your Excellency, if this menace is not urgently addressed and measures instituted to permanently eradicate it, the source of income for over 2.7 million Ghanaians will be lost: including breadwinners of both genders, 140,000 fishermen, along with thousands of fishmongers – the majority of whom are women – traders, canoe carvers, input suppliers and fish carriers, as well as their dependents.

This will have large-scale, widespread negative impacts on food security, nutrition, incomes and livelihoods, while presenting a threat to national security. Not only will poverty in more than 200 vulnerable communities increase, so too will malnutrition among children, since fish is the cheapest and often only readily available source of protein within these communities. The loss of jobs amongst the youth will contribute to the rise of social vices and crime within the fishing communities and our wider society. The collapse of the people’s fish will further undermine your government’s vitally important “Planting for Food and Jobs” agenda.

Your Excellency, saiko provides direct jobs to no more than 1,500 individuals whereas artisanal fisheries provide 140,000 jobs to fishermen alone and over 2.7 million in dependent trades. The illegal saiko trade, with over 90% of fish traded being juveniles, deprives the marine ecosystem of the opportunity to rebuild as fish do not reach maturity to reproduce.

Mr. President, as Co-Chair of the SDG Advocates group, you rightly said *“This is a time of great hope for the world. If we work smartly together and stay on course, we can raise millions out of poverty and significantly expand basic social services for many more by the 2030 end date of the SDG’s”*. Permanently ending saiko, which has become the most dangerous form of IUU fishing, will contribute greatly to achieving the targets set in SDG 14 (Life Below Water). It will protect the livelihoods of Ghanaians in coastal communities and contribute to alleviating poverty and malnutrition in the coastal communities.

Mr President, during the 2020 Budget Statement on the floor of Parliament, the Hon Finance Minister stated in paragraph 718 that:

“...the Ministry will intensify the implementation of the Fisheries Act, 2002, (Act 625) to ensure that domestic, regional and international laws that prohibit IUU fishing are strictly enforced through the following: ... all domestic and international fleet that are involved in “Saiko” fishing (i.e transshipment at sea) shall be banned from fishing in Ghanaian waters”.

However, we have not witnessed the implementation of the above proclamation nor the urgently needed enforcement actions necessary to eradicate saiko.

Having previously successfully halted saiko activity in 2018, and with the allocation of budget in 2020, you have demonstrated that your government is fully capable and ready to eradicate this illegal practice, which violates the 2010 Fisheries Regulations.

We note again, with urgency, that any hope of saving Ghana’s fisheries from collapse, is contingent on ending the saiko menace without delay. We note also that in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, safeguarding livelihoods and food security has acquired an even more pressing urgency.

We therefore respectfully call upon you to lead and ensure the necessary actions are taken to end saiko fishing for good. Taking such action will resonate powerfully with the many coastal communities that currently suffer as a result of saiko.

We thank you for your consideration and leadership on this pressing matter of national importance.