

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE HARASSMENT OF ONION SUPPLIERS BY THE POLICE AND CUSTOMS OFFICIALS BY HONOURABLE DR ROBERT BABA KUGANAB-LEM, MP FOR BINDURI, BY HON AHMED IBRAHIM, MP FOR BANDA - 14 FEBRUARY, 2017**

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity.

In commenting on the Statements, I have to commend the Hon Members who made those Statements for bringing such serious and critical issues to our attention. I can also not go without commending Mr Speaker for directing that those Statements be referred to the appropriate Ministries for quick action.

These are issues that are known in this country. The way they happen is what makes them reoccur. I strongly believe that the direction you have given would bring these matters to a halt.

Mr Speaker, first of all, about mining and deforestation in most of our restricted areas. I come from one of those constituencies which is close to those areas. Right from our school days, in our educational books, from the junior high school level through the senior high school to the universities, the causes, effects and harm of deforestation on this nation, are known.

Yet those people we complain about, go through all those schools only to come and join those groups who are perpetrating those atrocities in our country. One of them is the overgrazing by cattle rearers in restricted forest areas. There are overgrazing, deforestation and galamsey operators' activities.

Rapidly, the depletion of our forest reserves is at an exponential rate. The peasant farmers who have farms dotted around the rural areas of this country are so poor to the extent that they cannot face these challenges alone.

I am a Member of Parliament and on some occasions, when these cattle rearers come with herds of cattle and invade the constituency, the first person they look for is the Member of Parliament. This is just to establish rapport with you. The next person they look for is the District Chief Executive (DCE). From there, they look for the District Commander then the powers that be, just to establish rapport with them.

Mr Speaker, these are common things. Therefore, when you refuse at a certain point, a farmer comes to you to complain "my farm has been raided by cattle rearers". You report to the Police and they say tomorrow, they would go and look at the farm. When they go to the farm, it is the Fulani who is made to decide how much he can give to the farmer, instead of the other way around where those whose properties are destroyed, should have been those to come out with prices.

If you want to trace this further, you would realise that some people are really adamant in pursuing some of those issues. So, I was happy that currently — the

former Minister for Energy is not here — When the Hon Inusah Fuseini happened to be the Hon Minister for Lands and Forestry, he was very active in arresting some of those foreigners who were doing galamsey in some of those forest reserves.

Unfortunately, he was promoted. From the Ministry of Lands and Forestry, he became the Minister for Energy and because the work there was so huge — [Interruption] — So, I do not know the outcome of those who were arrested. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker, my Hon Colleague has misconstrued me. He was reshuffled —

Mr Speaker, I withdraw that word. I meant that some were reshuffled but he was reshuffled to continue.

Mr Speaker, the former Minister for Lands and Forestry, Hon Inusah Fuseini, was vigorously pursuing this, chasing people with the immigration officers, forest guards and police officers to those illegal immigrants who were mining in these forest reserves. The entire country was happy about that but that recently is not seen.

If the Hon Chairman for the Committee on Lands and Forestry said about 29 of those foreign illegal miners have been arrested, it means the practice is being continued. Collectively, we must come together and bring that issue to a rest. The farmers alone cannot do it because of how sophisticated and well-armed those perpetrators are.

If collectively this House does not help in making sure that the Committee on Defence and Interior, for Lands and Forestry together with the sector Ministers of these two Ministries help the peasant farmers to protect our depleted forests, onion sellers from some of those illegal miners, we would realise that very soon, Ghana's vegetation would not be different from the Saharan vegetation which happens to be producers of the onions we import. The earlier we act, the better.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to make these few comments.