

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE JUSTICE ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD, UNDER THE THEME: 'ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE FOR EVERY CHILD IN AFRICA', 16 JUNE 2026

The Commission joins the continent in commemorating the 2026 Day of the African Child. This observance honors the courage and sacrifice of the schoolchildren of Soweto who, on 16 June 1976, stood against injustice to demand equal education and dignity. Today, their legacy serves as an urgent call to action for African states to dismantle the modern barriers still undermining the welfare of children.

Aligned with this year's theme, access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is a fundamental human right intrinsically linked to life, health, and education. Yet, millions of African children continue to face severe structural barriers to these necessities. UNICEF and WHO estimate that 802 million schoolchildren globally lack basic handwashing facilities, with sub-Saharan Africa disproportionately affected. Locally, the situation is equally critical: Ghana's Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources reports that only 25.3% of households have access to basic toilets, while open defecation persists in many communities. This infrastructure deficit in schools continually exposes children to preventable diseases, high absenteeism, and social stigma, directly undermining their developmental rights.

The Commission is deeply concerned that, in Ghana, these vulnerabilities are further aggravated by the destruction and pollution of vital water bodies through illegal mining. This environmental degradation severely compromises children's access to safe water and creates hazardous learning conditions, a burden that falls heaviest on girls, children with disabilities, and those in rural, low-income communities. Protecting our water bodies is therefore not merely an environmental obligation; it is an absolute child rights imperative.

While the Commission acknowledges recent government interventions to tackle illegal mining, such as the Blue Water Initiative, the deployment of Blue Water Guards, enhanced inter-agency enforcement, land reclamation, and mining sector regulatory reforms, these measures must be sustained, strictly enforced, and matched by transparent public accountability.

Consequently, the Commission calls on the Government, relevant ministries, departments and agencies, traditional authorities, development partners and civil society to intensify efforts to safeguard water bodies and aggressively expand child-friendly WASH infrastructure in schools and communities. Ghana's binding obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), and the 1992 Constitution require no less.



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