



## **CODEO VOLTA REGION STATEMENT ON THE MENACE OF POLITICAL PARTY VIGILANTISM IN GHANA**

**Media Briefing addressed jointly by Mr. John Larvie and Togbe Adom Drayi II, CODEO Advisory Board Members held on Wednesday, July 5, 2017 at Chances Hotel, Ho, Volta Region**

### **Salutation**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen from the Media

### **Introduction**

On behalf of the Advisory Board of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), I welcome you to this media briefing on the subject of political party vigilantism in Ghana. We are grateful to you for honoring our invitation.

### **Background**

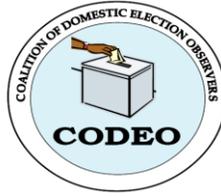
As you may be aware, the phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities have gradually found their way onto the centre stage of Ghana's electoral politics, particularly under the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the 2000s. The 2016 Presidential and General Elections of Members of Parliament were without exception. The immediate post-election phase also witnessed some incidents around the political transition, nearly marring the almost smooth process. Unfortunately, the manifestations of political party vigilante groups have continued from the transition and into the governing period.

At its post-election national stakeholder workshop, held at Aqua Safari Resort in Ada in the Greater Accra region from March 27-29, 2017, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) made this subject of political vigilantism one of the pressing post-election issues for discussion and deliberation. This was in recognition of the danger that political party vigilante groups pose to the country's electoral politics and democratic development.

### **CODEO's stance on political party vigilantism**

In a communiqué issued on April 6, 2017 in Accra after the post-election stakeholders review meeting, CODEO condemned this growing feature of the country's electoral politics. CODEO further called on political parties to disband these affiliated groups. It urged other stakeholders, particularly the security agencies, to address this growing menace. Specifically, CODEO observed that,

- The existence of political vigilante groups is illegal and the Ghana Police Service should ban and disband these groups immediately as a matter of national security.
- The leadership of the NPP and the NDC who are largely responsible for the emergence of these groups in the 4th Republic should own up to their responsibilities and work together with the police to disband all politically affiliated vigilante groups.
- In the medium to long term, there should be a concerted effort amongst key election stakeholders to make the Inspector General of Police independent by insulating him/her from



political interference by securing his/her tenure across regimes and ensuring such appointments are transparent and consultative.

### **Going forward**

In order to sustain the conversation on ridding the country's political space of party vigilantes and their activities and to prevent the matter from being overshadowed by other governance developments, CODEO is embarking on a nationwide public engagement through roundtable discussions on this growing phenomenon. This series of public engagement, made possible with the generous support of the American people through United States Agency for International Development (USAID) seeks to create awareness of this phenomenon, and thereby contribute to civic and voter education on it. These engagements will also be used to collate views from regional level stakeholders on the phenomenon that will be used to develop comprehensive policy recommendations for stakeholders and relevant institutions to implement.

In line with CODEO's plan of publicly engaging regional stakeholders at Roundtable Discussions on the phenomenon of political party vigilantism, the second in the series was held yesterday, Tuesday July 4, 2017 at the Chances Hotel in Ho in the Volta Region.

Stakeholders at the Roundtable Discussion made the following observations about party vigilantism in the region:

- Stakeholders confirmed that there is a low incidence of political party vigilante activities in the Volta Region. However, there is evidence that one or two standing groups emerged during the 2016 elections in the border areas.
- The mode of group formation and use is also different in the region. Parties and individuals may form groups outside of the party structure on an ad-hoc basis to perform various duties before, during and after elections. These include policing the voter registration exercise and voting process. There have been instances where individuals may form groups to offer their services to parties and individuals.
- As a result of the way in which parties use these groups outside of the party structures to undertake activities of the party, they do not consider these groups as party vigilantes.
- Therefore, the parties struggle with the idea of disciplining party supporters or denouncing groups mobilized by the party, because they consider them to be defending the parties' interest.
- The security services also confirmed that there is political interference in their work when dealing with cases relating to vigilante groups and hence hampers the efforts to end the menace.

With regards to finding lasting solutions to the phenomenon of party vigilantism, participants agreed that:

- Political party vigilantes need to be disbanded as a matter of urgency.
- A law should be passed to criminalize the formation and activities of such groups.



- The Inspector General of Police and the top hierarchy of the Police should be insulated from political interference through securing their tenure of office.
- At the same time, officers of the security services and Electoral Commission should at all times be strictly professional and non-partisan in the conduct of their duties to reduce the politicization of these public services.
- Government should vigorously pursue job creation to provide enough avenues for young people to channel their energies productively.
- There must be continuous civic education of party members particularly 'foot soldiers' beyond elections by the parties; this could be done through the political party schools that some parties plan to establish. This education must focus on improving understanding of democracy, good governance and structures of government, in addition to issues of party philosophy and ideas.
- The negative phenomenon of 'winner takes all' in the body politic of the country must be addressed, if we are to discourage young people from joining vigilante groups.
- The Media in Ghana should bring the same level of commitment to bear on tackling the phenomenon of political vigilantism as they are doing with the fight against 'galamsey.'

### **Conclusion**

As you may know, CODEO's primary and broad objective is to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission and indeed all stakeholders in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections in the country. CODEO will continue to advocate for peaceful and credible elections during and in between elections. CODEO calls on all stakeholders, including the political parties, security agencies, and the public at large to as a matter of urgency, address this growing menace. CODEO calls on all Ghanaians to work together to support this crusade against political party vigilantism in our electoral politics. CODEO further calls on the media to make this subject critical for public discussion and urge them not to allow this matter to disappear from the public discourse until it is eradicated.

Finally, CODEO acknowledges the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for supporting CODEO's post-2016 election activities.

Thank you and God Bless Ghana!!!

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Albert Kofi Arhin".

Albert Kofi Arhin, National Coordinator, CODEO

Dated: Wednesday, July 5, 2017.

### **About CODEO and Election Observation in Ghana**

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) is an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organizations, and professional bodies, which observe Ghanaian



elections. It was established in the year 2000 under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) to mobilize citizens of Ghana to actively participate in the electoral process and to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections. With twenty-two founding organizations in 2000, CODEO currently comprises 42 organizations (*See CODEO Brochure for the list of CODEO member organizations in your folders*) CODEO has become a platform for citizens and groups to participate in the Ghanaian democratic process. CODEO is a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM). CODEO is also a founding member of the West African Election Observers Network (WAEON).