



Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO)

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UP-COMING VOTER REGISTRATION EXERCISE: LET'S BUILD CONSENSUS ON USE OF EXISTING VOTER ID CARD

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) is deeply concerned about the inability of key stakeholders to forge broad consensus over a credible way forward for the compilation of the voter register, having regard to the exceptional circumstances brought upon the nation by the COVID-19 pandemic and the extremely compressed electoral calendar.

CODEO remains fully cognizant of the fact that the Electoral Commission (EC) has the fundamental responsibility to deliver credible elections in Ghana. CODEO affirms its long-standing commitment to support the Commission to achieve this crucial mandate, through an election management process that fosters inclusivity, national peace and mutual trust between the Commission and key election stakeholders.

After careful consideration of the critical issues at stake in the preparations towards the December 2020 general elections, CODEO wishes to draw the attention of the EC to significant challenges presented by the following provisions in the Constitutional Instrument (CI) 126, Public Elections (Registration of Voters) Amendment Regulations, 2020:

- a. The provision that proof of eligibility to register to vote can be established only by the production of either a valid Ghanaian passport or a national identification card issued by the National Identification Authority (NIA); that these two are the only legitimate identification documents for proof of eligibility to register to vote in the up-coming registration exercise; and
- b. In the absence of either of the two documents specified above, prospective registrants must fill out a 'guarantor form' to be endorsed by two 'registered voters'.

While the Coalition acknowledges that this is a matter before the Supreme Court of the land, it also believes that it might proper for the EC to take a second look at these provisions due to the challenges that they are likely to present to prospective registrants, the Commission itself, and, indeed the electoral process.

CODEO believes that a good number of eligible Ghanaians do not currently possess either of the two identification cards. Therefore, a substantial number of prospective registrants would be compelled to rely on guarantors to be able to exercise their right to be registered as voters. In communities where only a few people possess the requisite identity documents, there will be real difficulty on the part of qualified citizens in exercising their right to register to vote.

CODEO recalls with consternation, the abuse of the guarantor system in previous registration exercises (as highlighted in its reports on previous registration exercises it observed) in which some registered voters turned themselves into 'guarantee contractors' vouching for the eligibility of all manner of persons who might be in fact unqualified to be registered. The same system tended to create extreme tension in the voter registration process, with some political party agents

and activists physically preventing persons who lacked the requisite identification documents from registering, sometimes on the basis of mere suspicion. It is important to note that if the proposed eligibility provisions are maintained, we would be faced with a situation where, for the first time in the history of elections under the 4th Republic, many potential voters will have to rely on the guarantor system to establish their eligibility to be registered to vote.

As the vast majority of prospective voters in Ghana's December 2020 polls already possess a Voter Identity card issued by the Commission since 2012, CODEO believes it would be proper and appropriate for the EC to include the existing Voter ID card among the documents one could use to establish eligibility to register in the 2020 registration exercise. CODEO is convinced that the Commission will foster a much more congenial atmosphere for electoral inclusion and peace ahead of the December polls if citizens who desire to register to vote are allowed to use their existing voter ID card to do so. Doing so will help reduce the number of qualified persons who would have to rely on the guarantor system, and thereby, help reduce the incidence of confrontation and tensions associated with the guarantor system. CODEO also urges the EC to give prominence in its voter education programs to the sanctions applicable to persons caught abusing the guarantor system.

Given the critical role of the electoral process in upholding democratic governance, national peace security, and development, CODEO urges all elections stakeholders, particularly political party leaders and supporters, to utilize legal and peaceful processes to seek redress to all grievances. CODEO regrets and denounces the increasing toxic and belligerent tone of political speeches and debates on the airwaves and social media and cautions all Ghanaians, including political party leaders, to be mindful of the dangers that the politics of violence and violent speech pose to national cohesion, peace and security and the potentially detrimental effects on the country's development and progress.

As the country moves towards the December 7, 2020 elections, CODEO entreats all well-meaning Ghanaians to be restrained in their actions and utterances, putting the national interest above narrow and partisan and sectional interests.

Long live Ghana, long live our democracy.

Signed:
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