



## **THE MENACE OF POLITICAL PARTY VIGILANTISM IN GHANA**

### **REFLECTIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN BOLGATANGA, UPPER EAST REGION**

**Media Briefing addressed jointly by Sheikh Arimiyawo Shaibu, a CODEO Advisory Board Member and Mr. Albert Kofi Arhin, CODEO National Coordinator held on Saturday, July 15, 2017 at Extee Crystal Hotel, Bolgatanga, Upper East 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 about political party vigilantism in Ghana. We are grateful to you for honoring our invitation.

#### **Background**

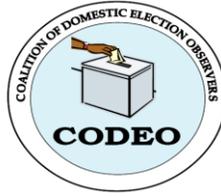
As you may be aware, the phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities have gradually found its way onto the centre stage of Ghana's electoral politics, particularly under the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante 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 stated 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 Regional Roundtable Discussions on this growing phenomenon. This series of public engagements, made possible with the generous support of the American people through the 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.

The CODEO team continued with the regional engagements in Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region on Friday, July 14, 2017 at the Extee Crystal Hotel.

Below were some of the views expressed by participants at the roundtable discussion:

- As with Tamale and the other places already visited, complain of security biases and mistrust continued to dominate the discussion.
- There was also the belief that the security agencies are inadequately resourced to effectively deal with criminal activities, especially those committed by the vigilante groups.
- There is the belief that the Police Service is not independent enough, and always gives preferential treatment to parties in power and their supporters.
- It was clear from the discussions that all the political parties are aware of the existence of the parties' affiliate vigilante groups, and indeed some of them endorse their activities but hypocritically deny their conduct and activities in public.
- Perceived insecurity continues to be identified as a major cause of the formation of more vigilante groups in the region.
- There are virtually no sanctions applied to vigilante groups when they commit crimes against members of opposition parties, but a few of the criminal acts are punished when vigilante groups attack members of their own political parties.
- Some powerful individuals within political parties secretly form their own vigilante groups to champion their personal interests.



- Within the same political parties, some of the leaders expressed fear of the activities of the vigilante groups against their own party executives and members.
- There is lack of effective mechanisms to regulate the conduct and the activities of even known and registered political party youth groups.
- Economic hardships and unemployment was identified as a major cause of the proliferation of vigilante groups in the region.
- It came out that the vigilante groups are aware of the illegal nature of some of their conducts and activities, but they are emboldened to do it because they are assured of protection from their political leadership.
- Motivation for their actions is mostly based on expected rewards from the party when they win political power. Vigilante groups therefore tie their fortunes to that of their political parties.
- There was strong perception that governments manipulate the security agencies in terms of appointments, promotions and transfers for their political interest.
- Political parties infiltrate the recruitment of temporary staff of the Electoral Commission and this breeds mistrust and perceived corruption in the electoral process.
- There is ineffective logistical arrangement by the Electoral Commission with regards to distribution and collection of electoral materials after polls.
- The public has not been very critical in condemning the conduct and activities of political parties, vigilante groups and other election stakeholders when they violate the electoral rules.
- There was strong expression of lack of effective civic and voter education in the region.

With regards to finding lasting solutions to the phenomenon of party vigilantism, there was consensus among participants that:

- Security agencies should be well resourced to be able to deal with the complexities of the vigilante groups.
- The new Transformation Program of the Ghana Police Service should work on the professional character development of the personnel.
- Again, as in other regions, participants canvassed strongly for the position of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to have security of tenure.
- The Police Council should work to standardize the recruitment, promotion and transfer of police personnel in order to boost their confidence and be able to discharge their duties professionally against political manipulations.
- There should be strict and equal application of the law against all criminal offences irrespective of the personalities involved or their political colour.
- The Police Service should monitor carefully the activities of all youth groups and disband all criminal and combative youth groups.
- The government should provide the youth with employable skills.
- The government should endeavour to create more jobs for the numerous unemployed youth.
- Political parties should review the Parties Code of Conduct to regulate activities of youth groups within their parties and sanction them appropriately if they violate the rules.



- Political parties should train and deploy qualified personnel as their polling agents.
- The Electoral Commission should review its recruitment criteria for temporary staff and be very alert for possible infiltration of political party agents.
- The Electoral Commission should make adequate arrangements for timely distribution and collection of electoral materials immediately after polls.
- The public should strongly condemn vigilante activities and name and shame all political leaders who form, support and patronize the services of vigilante groups.
- The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), religious leaders and all identifiable groups who have the opportunity to meet with youth should intensify education against vigilantism.
- The media should educate society about the dangers of political party vigilantism and hold leaders accountable for their actions.

### **The 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: Saturday, July 15, 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).