



REFLECTIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN KUMASI, ASHANTI REGION

Media Briefing addressed jointly by Mr. Nicholas Akyire, CODEO Advisory Board Member and Ambassador Francis Tsegah, Senior Fellow, CODEO Secretariat held on Wednesday, August 2, 2017 at the Crystal Rose Ambassador Hotel, Ashanti 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 political party vigilantism in Ghana. We are grateful to you for honoring our invitation. This media briefing is the eighth in the series of engagements CODEO has had since it started the regional discussions in Koforidua, Ho, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Wa, Takoradi and Cape Coast.

Background

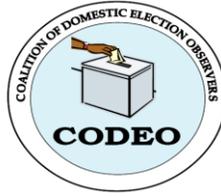
The phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities has been an aberration in Ghana's politics, especially in the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the year 2000. The 2016 Presidential and General Election 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 following the post-election stakeholders review workshop, 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 Government should ban these groups immediately as a matter of national security.
- The leaderships 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.



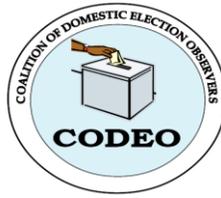
- In the medium to long term, there should be a concerted effort amongst key election stakeholders to make the Inspector General of Police independent by insulating him/her from political interference by securing his/her tenure across regimes and ensuring such appointments are transparent and genuinely consultative.

Going forward

To broaden and sustain the conversation on ridding the country's political space of party vigilantes and their activities, and to prevent the issue from being overshadowed by other governance developments, CODEO has embarked on Regional Roundtable Discussions on this phenomenon. This series of public engagement, 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. CODEO has so far organized seven regional discussions in the Eastern, Volta, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Western and Central regions respectively.

The eighth in the series of Round Table Discussions (RTDs) was held at the Crystal Rose Ambassador Hotel, Kumasi in the Ashanti Region on Tuesday, August 1, 2017 to deliberate and collate more views on the phenomenon. Participants shared the following perspectives:

- Vigilante groups emerge to either protect their strongholds or make incursions into the strongholds of their opponents.
- Wide mistrust for the Security Services are based on the following reasons:
 - a. The Inspector General of Police (IGP) and other top officials of security agencies are appointed at the instance of the sitting President.
 - b. The President and the ruling party are perceived to have control over the Security Services who tend to display bias towards opposition parties.
 - c. The leadership of political parties in power are generally provided with adequate security details unlike the opposition leadership which have no such arrangements.
 - d. As a result of these perceived biases, opposition parties form their own youth groups or vigilante groups to protect their interests.
- The Electoral Commission (EC) is perceived as not trustworthy. Some of the temporary staff recruited by the Commission do not fully apply the laws regulating the conduct of elections.
- There are lapses in the security arrangements of the EC during the pre-election and election day phases.
- Political parties do not have codified rules to regulate vigilante groups.
- Prior to elections, political parties make unattainable promises to vigilante groups which are often not fulfilled thereby incurring the displeasure of vigilante groups which sparks misconduct on their part.
- There is lack of education for party membership on party ideology, constitutional and civic rights.



- Mutual mistrust among political parties often leads to the spread of unfounded rumors and allegations which are acted upon without proper inquiry.
- In most cases funding of vigilante groups are clandestinely done by influential individuals within the political parties.
- The media do not seem to be professional in their reportage on electoral issues including the activities of vigilante groups.

The key issues brought out by participants at the Roundtable Discussion indicate that political party vigilantism poses a serious threat to Ghana's peace and security and by reinforcing the call to disband such vigilante groups. **Based on these key issues, the following recommendations were proposed by the participants:**

- The Police Service should endeavor to provide adequate security for all presidential aspirants especially during campaign periods.
- The independence of the IGP should be safeguarded through appointment to the office by an independent body and security of tenure for the office holder ensured.
- The Electoral Commission (EC) is entreated to display professionalism in all aspects of its work and strive to ensure that adequate and quality training is provided for their staff including the temporary staff.
- The EC should be proactive and transparent in engaging stakeholders especially the Security Services and political parties before, during and after elections.
- Since the activities of all stakeholders at the polling stations are complementary, there should be a collaborative training for the EC temporary staff, the Police and party agents to understand and appreciate one another's role and to foster cooperation among them.
- Political parties should urgently take steps to develop and enforce codes of conduct to regulate activities of youth groups to bring sanity into their operations.
- Political party leaders should desist from making unachievable promises to their followers.
- Political parties should work at transforming youth or vigilante groups and redirect their activities fruitfully and productively. This should help inculcate in them party ideologies, constitutional and civic rights.
- The NCCE should continuously engage political parties through the Inter-Party Dialogue Committee (IPDC) to deal with emerging issues among parties.
- The media should be circumspect and balanced in their reportage on issues relating to political parties and especially activities of vigilante groups.

The Conclusion

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 again 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:

Albert Kofi Arhin, CODEO National Coordinator

Dated: Wednesday, August 2, 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).