



REFLECTIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN SUNYANI, BRONG AHAFO REGION

Media Briefing addressed jointly by Mr. Nicholas Akyire, CODEO Advisory Board Member and Ambassador Francis Tsegah, Senior Fellow, CODEO Secretariat held on Friday, August 4, 2017 at the Tyco City Hotel, Brong Ahafo 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 ninth in the series of engagements CODEO has had since it started the regional discussions.

Background

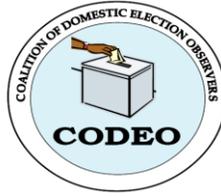
The phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities has been an aberration in Ghana's politics, especially in the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the year 2000. The 2016 Presidential and General Elections of Members of Parliament was not exempted. 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 eight regional discussions in the Eastern, Volta, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Western, Central and Ashanti regions respectively.

The ninth in the series of Round Table Discussions (RTDs) was held at the Tyco City Hotel, Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo Region on Thursday, August 3, 2017 to deliberate and collate more views on the phenomenon. Participants shared the following insights:

- There is a serious manifestation of political party vigilantism in the region. A few of the vigilante groups are organized and based in the major cities of the region; however, majority are community based and mostly organized around influential individuals within the political parties.
- Some of the vigilante groups may not be identified by group names of their own as observed in other regions but are mainly identified by the names of their leaders or sponsors.
- In addition, some of the vigilante groups are imported from other regions or elsewhere by the political parties during major political and electoral activities.
- There are other vigilante groups in the region which basically serve as body guards for traditional authorities but are also ready to fight for politicians when their services are requested.
- Yet, there are other vigilante groups which do not belong to any political party and are ready to offer their services to any party which needs them.
- It was established that the activities of vigilante groups have been a threat to the peace and security of the region and some have led to the deaths and maiming of many people.
- There are no laid down mechanisms by the political parties to regulate the activities of vigilante groups; however, they are controlled by influential individuals within the parties.
- There is strong mistrust and suspicion among political parties especially of the Police Service and Electoral Commission (EC) which lead to the formation of more vigilante groups by the political parties to protect their interest during elections.
- Continuous and unachievable promises by political party leaders sway the youth into joining political party vigilante groups.



- The package to politicians pursuant to Article 71 seems so lucrative that politicians use all means either fair or foul to win their seats to benefit from the package.
- The winner-takes-all syndrome was also identified as a cause of more vigilante groups wanting to associate with political parties in the hope of enjoying patronage spoils when their parties win political power.
- Added to the winner-takes all syndrome, are the excessive executive powers wielded by the President which give him the authority to take all major decisions in the country.
- It was made clear that some security personnel continue to maintain their partisan affiliations after recruitment into the security services, a development which compromises their professional conduct.
- In addition, some security personnel play to the corridors of powers for favours in terms of transfers and promotions.
- There is so much political interference in the work of the security agencies with regards to recruitment, promotion and transfer of security personnel.
- The Ghana Police Service has not complied with the provision in Article 204 of the Constitution which enjoins it to establish a Regional Police Committee with the task of advising the Police Council on security issues in the region.
- Unemployment is one of the causes of more youth joining vigilante groups with the hope that they will be rewarded with jobs by their political parties when they win political power.
- The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) is not well resourced to be able to carry out its core functions effectively.

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. Participants reiterated the need to find lasting solutions to the phenomenon of political party vigilantism. **Based on these key issues, the following recommendations were proposed by the participants:**

- The intelligence unit of the Security Services in the region should map out vigilante activities and develop specific strategies to deal with them.
- Political parties should develop more rules and regulations to govern the activities of their youth groups.
- Stakeholders particularly the media should name and shame politicians who form, fund and solicit for the services of vigilante groups.
- There should be a platform for redressing differences among political parties in the region; for example, by using the Inter Party Dialogue Committee (IPDC) established by the NCCE.
- Leaderships of political parties should be truthful to their followers and be moderate with the promises given to their supporters.
- There should be a national dialogue to consider certain provisions in the Constitution which may need to be amended including:



(a) the package laid out in Article 71 which seems to make politics more lucrative and encourages politicians to use every means to achieve political power.

(b) tackle the syndrome of winner-takes-all and the excessive powers wielded by the President.

- The government should establish skills training centers to build the capacity of uneducated youth to make them employable.
- Government in collaboration with the private sector should contribute to the solution of growing unemployment in the country by creating more jobs or offering assistance to the youth who would like to establish their own private businesses.
- As a matter of urgency, the Regional Police Service should establish the Regional Police Committee as required in Article 204 to enable it to feed the Police Council with the necessary security information for prompt action.
- The Police Service should improve on its professional standards. In furtherance of that, the Police Service should strictly adhere to internal structures with regards to recruitment, promotion and transfer of Police personnel. With the full support of the Police Council, the Service should resist all attempts by politicians to interfere with these processes.
- The positions of the head of security agencies should be secured by ensuring that they enjoy security of tenure of office. This will hopefully embolden them to enforce laws without fear or favour.
- The EC should be more professional, transparent and independent in the performance of its duties to avoid mistrust and suspicion from the major stakeholders, by broadening its engagements with stakeholders on all major electoral activities.
- The NCCE should concentrate and do more on its core mandate of educating the citizenry on their rights and responsibilities.
- The Government should adequately resource the NCCE to be effective and efficient in carrying out its mandate.
- Religious bodies should use the pulpit, mosque or any platform available to them to preach against political party vigilantism.
- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), traditional authorities and other opinion leaders must join the crusade against vigilantism by educating and sensitizing the public on the dangers associated with it.

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: Friday, August 4, 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).