

THE MENACE OF POLITICAL PARTY VIGILANTISM IN GHANA

REFLECTIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN TAKORADI, WESTERN REGION

Media Briefing addressed jointly by Mr. Nicholas Akyire, CODEO Advisory Board Member and Mr. Albert Kofi Arhin, CODEO National Coordinator held on Wednesday, July 26, 2017 at the Grand Favor Hotel, Takoradi, Western 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. This media briefing is the sixth in the series of engagements CODEO has had since it started the regional discussions. Media briefings have taken place in Koforidua, Ho, Tamale, Bolgatanga and Wa. It is now the turn of Takoradi.

Background

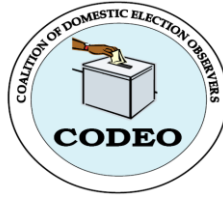
The phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities have been an aberration in Ghana's politics, especially in the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the 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 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.



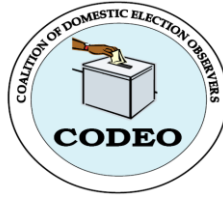
- The leaderships of the NPP and the NDC who are largely responsible for the emergence of these groups in the 4th Republic should own up to their responsibilities and work together with the police to disband all politically affiliated vigilante groups.
- In the medium to long term, there should be a 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

In order to broaden and 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 has embarked on Regional Roundtable Discussions on this growing 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 five regional discussions in the Eastern, Volta, Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions.

The sixth in the series of RTDs was held at the Grand Favor Hotel, Takoradi in the Western Region on Tuesday, July 25th, 2017 to deliberate and collate more views on the phenomenon. The following are some of the perspectives shared by participants:

- There was consensus on lack of trust in the security agencies, most especially the Police Service.
- Political manipulation that negatively affects the professional conduct of the security agencies.
- Expression of serious infiltration in the enlistment and recruitment process of security agency personnel.
- There is a seeming perception with regards to the Police Services' mandate to prosecute offenses in relation to elections (distinguishing between purely electoral offenses and criminal offenses).
- Political parties are not provided adequate security especially during election campaign periods.
- Mutual suspicion and mistrust among political parties.
- All political parties, even including the smaller parties have party foot soldiers. Members of these groups are known to the parties and some of them are registered by the parties.
- Most of these foot soldiers or groups in political parties are formed around influential individuals within the parties.
- Even though political parties have developed code of ethics to regulate the activities of their foot soldiers, sanctions are mostly applied against members when they offend their own party executives and members. But there are no sanctions applied to them when they attack members of other political parties.



- High unemployment rate has been a major cause of the formation of political party vigilante groups.
- The actions of political party vigilante groups are often not planned but erupt spontaneously in defense of party interests.
- There seem to be a national breakdown of morals, patriotism and civic values.
- The neutrality of the Electoral Commission (EC) seems to be compromised, and it is one of the causes of violence around public activities of the EC.
- Seeming loss of voice and selective judgement with regards to national issues by other independent organizations (religious bodies, civil society organizations and influential personalities).

At the Roundtable Discussion, participants acknowledged the potential devastating effects that the activities of political party vigilante groups pose to the nation's peace and security and called for their disbandment. To that end, the following recommendations were made:

- Insulation of the processes of enlistment, recruitment, promotion and appointment of security personnel at all levels from political interference.
- There should be a security of tenure for the Inspector General of Police (IGP).
- The Police Transformation Program should hasten its work on the professional development of the Ghana Police Service.
- All criminal offences should be separated from electoral offences and prosecuted by the Police.
- Political parties should as a matter of urgency put in place internal control mechanisms (code of conducts/rules and regulations) to regulate the conduct and activities of their youth groups.
- Reactivation of Inter-Party Dialogue Committees (IPDC) at all levels to mediate conflicts among political parties.
- Political parties should eschew hypocrisy and tackle issues of vigilantism within their parties with all seriousness.
- Political parties should always convey decisions taken at Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) meetings and sensitize their supporters on them.
- Political Parties must be provided with adequate security, especially during elections so that they do not raise their own militia.
- Adequate platforms should be created for youth inclusion in decision making at all levels.
- The Electoral Commission must be seen to be neutral in their engagements with the public and all political parties.
- Families should take keen interest in the upbringing of their children.
- Public education and sensitization on morals, patriotism and civic values should be re-introduced and given prominence in schools and public discourses.
- Independent organizations (religious bodies, civil society organizations and influential personalities) should be apt in condemning political party vigilante activities perpetuated by all parties.



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 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, July 26, 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).